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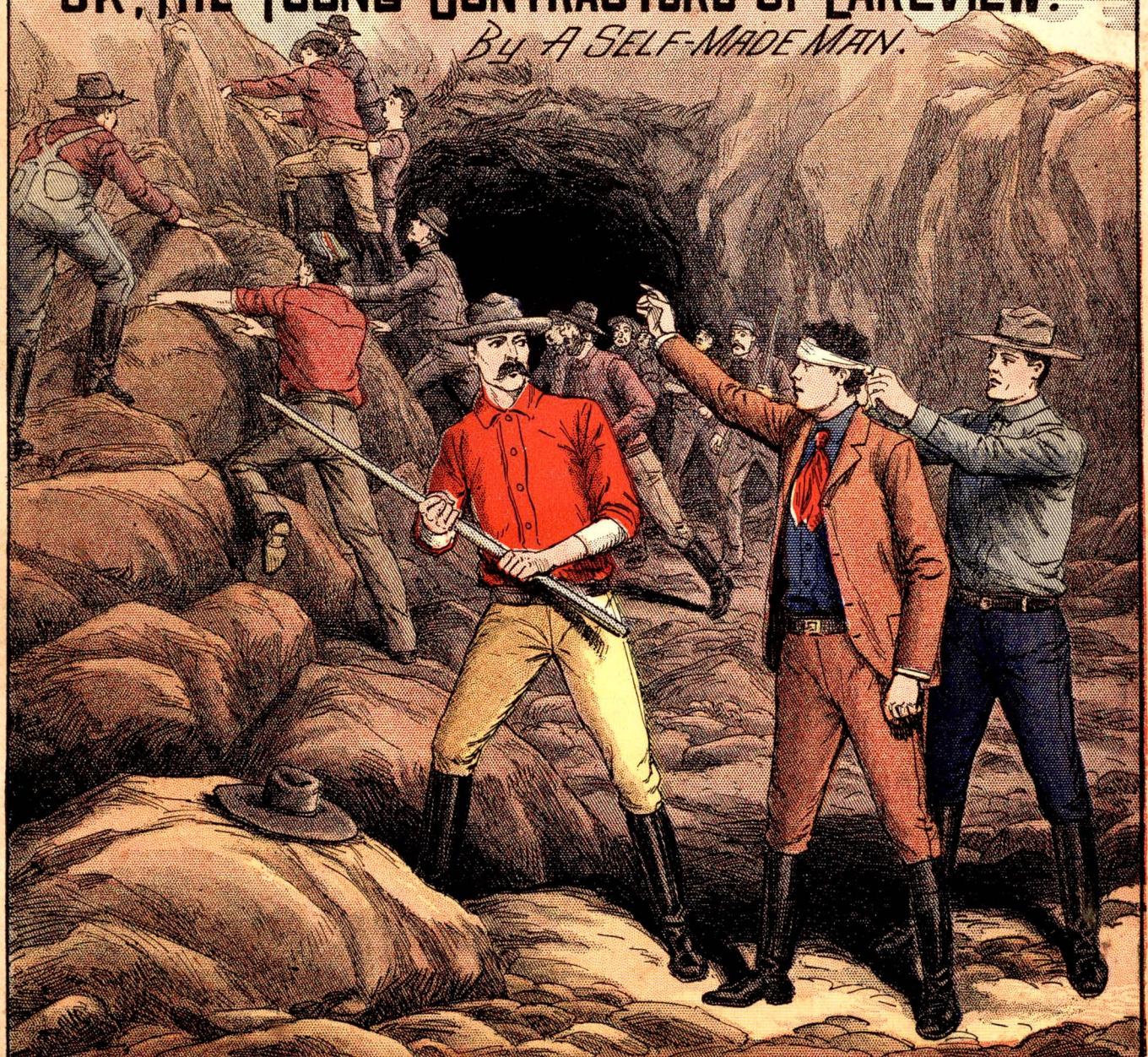
5 CENTS.

FAME AND FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF
BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

BUILDING A RAILROAD;
OR, THE YOUNG CONTRACTORS OF LAKEVIEW.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



"I met Kelso," said Don. "This wound is a gentle reminder of his presence and amiable intentions toward me." "Good heavens! That fellow has a nerve!" said Gil. The Italians, led by Sinkey, scaled the rocks like so many monkeys.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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BUILDING A RAILROAD;

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CHAPTER I.

THE RAILROAD CONTRACT.

"Well, Don," said Gilford Winthrop, a bright-eyed, earnest-looking lad of eighteen years, as his twin brother, Donald, entered the office of "John Winthrop, General Contractor," on Main street, in the town of Lakeview, "does the contract stand?"

There was a shade of anxiety in his voice, while his hazel eyes searched his brother's face as if he would read the answer in his expressive features.

"Yes, Gil," replied Don, in cheery tones, "everything is satisfactorily arranged. Mr. Prescott, the chief engineer of the D. P. & Q., assured me that the original bond is holding on the work, and so far as the railroad company's concerned, father's death will make no difference with respect to the contract."

"Good!" exclaimed Gil, with sparkling eyes.

"Andrew Newman was present, and he made a big fight to freeze us out. He said all manner of uncomplimentary things about you and I; but it did not do him any good, just the same."

"I'm glad the matter is settled, Don," said Gil, with an air of relief. "I was afraid that Newman would get the inside track of us. He's an old and experienced con-

tractor, you know. He expected to get this contract, in the first place, and was as mad as a hornet when it was awarded to father. The day it was signed Jim Kelso, Newman's confidential foreman, who was under the influence of liquor at the time, swore that father never would complete the work within the stipulated time. Do you think we may look for trouble from the Newman crowd?"

"It is quite possible they will try to annoy us all they can. We must be on our guard. It is up to us, Gil, to build the road within the time limit, not only for the honor of the thing, but to save forfeiture of the security bond, which you are aware amounts to twenty per cent of the approximate cost of the contract. No excuses for the non-fulfilment of the agreement will go with the railroad company."

Don walked over to the safe, took therefrom the blue prints and a copy of the general specifications for building the line of road covered by the contract.

The two boys sat down to a table and, with a pile of memoranda prepared by their father before he died, they were soon engrossed in a study of the situation.

The late John Winthrop had contracted to build a branch line for the D. P. & Q. railroad from Lakeview to the main line at Glendale, a distance of about twenty miles.

As this was not the first contract of the kind he had undertaken, he was well provided with the necessary facilities for the prosecution of such work.

His steam shovel outfit had a capacity of 2,500 cubic yards in ten hours, and it handled all kinds of material from the softest earth to shale rock, large boulders, tree-stumps, etc., and performed all the work of loosening and loading.

As the economical working of the shovel required that the material should be hauled away as fast as it was loaded, Mr. Winthrop had provided some thirty dirt cars, which, when the distance to the dump was short, were hauled by horses; otherwise they were made up in two trains and handled by a couple of narrow-gauge locomotives.

The steam shovel was indispensable on the present job, as the survey carried the line through a spur of the foot-hills, where a cut half a mile or more long would have to be excavated.

A short tunnel had to be cut through a cliff projecting into the lake. But by far the greater part of the roadbed would lie along a flat, comparatively level district bordering on the lake which gave its name to the town with which railroad connection was to be made.

An arm of this body of water ran close into the spur of the hill where the principal excavation was to be made, and Mr. Winthrop counted on this as a great advantage to him, as the fifty horse-power non-condensing engine employed to operate the steam shovel used so much water that the cost of water supply, which was a serious matter to him when water was not readily obtainable, was reduced to a minimum.

John Winthrop had only one competitor for the railroad contract.

This was Andrew Newman, a man by no means popular in that neighborhood, where he had done a great deal of road building for the county.

Newman wanted this particular contract badly, and he tried his level best to get it, making use of questionable methods. But possession of the proper plant enabled Winthrop to underbid him, and Newman felt very bitter toward his successful rival.

Winthrop had got things almost in shape for beginning the work, when one morning he was found dead in his chair in his private office.

The physician called in declared that he had died of heart failure. The case, therefore, did not go to the coroner, and in due time all that was mortal of John Winthrop was laid away in the town burying-ground.

A few days after the funeral Newman called on Mrs. Winthrop and made her an offer for the business and plant as it stood, which, of course, carried with it the railroad contract.

The offer was not at all satisfactory.

Besides, her two stalwart sons, Donald and Gilford, had determined to carry on their father's business.

They believed themselves fully competent to do so. Both had taken a three years' course of civil engineering, and

in addition thereto had had two years' practical experience under their father's eye.

For Mr. Winthrop's intention had been to eventually take his boys into partnership.

With a valuable contract at their disposal, and all the necessary means at hand to carry out the work outlined, it would have been a foolish move to dispose of the business, even at a fair price.

And Mr. Newman's offer could scarcely have been called a fair one.

He believed the Winthrop business was at his mercy.

For Don and Gil he had nothing but contempt.

He looked on them merely as boys.

Not for a moment did he believe they would attempt to carry out the contract for grading the twenty miles of roadbed between Lakeview and Glendale.

He was unpleasantly surprised when he discovered that such was really their intention.

"Ridiculous!" he exclaimed to his man Kelso, and his chief assistant, of course, agreed that the idea was preposterous.

"I shall see the chief engineer of the D. P. & Q. about it," he said angrily.

And he did.

He found Don Winthrop in consultation with Mr. Prescott.

He was admitted to the conference, and he used every argument in his power to convince the engineer that it would be folly to allow the Winthrop estate to carry on the contract with two such boys as Don and Gil in charge.

But Mr. Prescott had the records of the young fellows before him, and he saw no reason why the contract should not stand. The boys were fully prepared and apparently qualified to carry out the work, and the surety bond was good.

So Andrew Newman was disappointed in his effort to attain the object sought after.

The contract was to stand, and he was out of it.

We are sorry to say that the big contractor used some very strong language to relieve his feelings after he left the engineer's office.

If he had been disgruntled by losing the contract originally to John Winthrop, he was twice as much put out to be euchred by that gentleman's sons.

"I'll get square with those cubs for daring to beard me to my face. So they think they can build this branch line, do they?"

He laughed sardonically as he walked along the street toward his own office.

"They think they can do the work on time, eh? With a half-mile spur to be cut through in the hills and the tunnel at the cliff to blast out. Oh, yes; they'll do it. Not if Andrew Newman knows it they won't, and I guess he'll keep track of what they do. I swore their father shouldn't make a success of this work, and I meant it. I guess he was a bigger proposition than they are."

He stopped at a saloon to get a drink, a frequent habit

of his, and found his confidential foreman, Jim Kelso, lined up with a couple of cronies against the bar.

Jim was not in the least abashed when his boss surprised him in this position.

Kelso had a habit of doing pretty much as he pleased when business was not rushing, and Andrew Newman's affairs were somewhat slack just then.

He had only one contract on hand. It was a matter of road-building on the other side of the lake, and Kelso's assistant, Mike Mullen, was looking after that.

Newman called for a whisky, and, having drank it, he motioned Kelso to follow him outside.

"The railroad contract has been transferred to those boys in spite of everything I could do to the contrary," said Newman, gloweringly.

"Has it?" replied Kelso, with an unpleasant grin.

"They've got a cast-iron nerve to think they'll be able to put such an undertaking through in anything like the time stipulated."

"Failure to do it 'll cost 'em a pretty penny, I'm thinkin'," said Kelso, with another of his cheerful grins.

"Mebbe they will. But I reckon we ought to help 'em along in that direction."

"They won't need any assistance. I'm willing to bet a thousand dollars that they'll be all tangled up in less than a month."

"Don't be so sure of that, Mr. Newman," answered the foreman, with a sage wag of his head. "Them boys understand their business."

"Who says they do?" demanded the contractor angrily.

"I say so. If ye want to know my opinion, it's jest this: Them two lads are smarter'n chain lightnin'."

"What are you giving me, Jim Kelso?" growled Mr. Newman, with a lowering brow.

"Nothin' what I can't prove. If ye want to do them two boys up ye've got ter get right down ter business. Ye don't want ter take no chances. They may have bitten off more'n they kin chew with this railroad job; but ye'll be kinder surprised, mark my words, to see the way they'll go at it. Them boys ain't no kid-glove dudes. You'd know it by this time if ye'd paid any attention to 'em, which I guess ye haven't."

This plain statement on the part of his foreman was news, and not pleasant news, to Andrew Newman.

He wanted to discredit it, for he despised everything that bore the name of Winthrop; but he was keen enough to understand that there must be some ground for Kelso's dogged assertion.

"Your word is pretty good, Jim, but I'd like something more substantial in the way of evidence."

"You watch them boys after they get started on this job of gradin' and ye'll have all the evidence ye want," said his foreman, with a nod that carried a great deal of weight with it.

"Well," grunted Newman, "I don't care how smart they are, I'm going to pickle them. I'm going to drive them out of business, in these parts, at any rate. I'll bust them higher than a kite before I get through with them."

They'll regret the day they measured strength with Andrew Newman."

"Now ye're talkin'. And ye kin depend on me helpin' ye do it. I'm down on that fellow Don. He butted in 'tween my son Jerry and that there gal of mine, who thinks 'cause she's blind she kin do as she pleases. But I reckon I won't stand no sich nonsense."

"Where did you come to get hold of that girl, Jim? She isn't your daughter."

"Never mind how I come to get her. I ain't tellin' everythin' I know. She belongs to me, and that's enough said," retorted Kelso doggedly.

"Well, it's none of my business. Your affairs are your own. So long as you stand by me I'm your friend. If you hate one of the Winthrop cubs, so much the better. You'll take a greater relish in doing them up, and the worse they're done up the more satisfied I'll feel. Come into the office and we'll go over the matter and see how we'll go to work about the thing."

And thus, while Don Winthrop and his brother were arranging the final details for starting the grading of the railroad right of way, Andrew Newman and his assistant Jim Kelso were putting their heads together three blocks away, laying plans to defeat the efforts of the two bright young fellows to carry the work to a successful end.

CHAPTER II.

BLIND NELLIE.

Although Don and Gil Winthrop were twins, and of course of the same age, Don took the lead in everything without hesitation, and his brother instinctively accorded him first place and was content to follow at his dictation.

Gil was more like his mother, who was of a gentle, yielding disposition; while Don seemed to be the counterpart of his father, who had been a man of action, perseverance and uncommon energy.

The boys had never had a quarrel in their lives, and the possibility of a serious disagreement between them seemed very remote indeed.

So when the railroad contract was fairly started Don took the entire supervision of the job on his shoulders, and Gil was satisfied to pass the larger portion of his time in the neighborhood of the big steam shovel, which had begun to eat its way into that particular spur of the foothills which stood in the path of the projected roadbed.

A temporary track had been laid down for something like a mile and a half to the outskirts of Lakeview for the purpose of hauling the earth from the hills to a ten-acre plot of low, swampy ground. This piece of land the Winthrop brothers had purchased cheap, and proposed to reclaim it by raising it to a level with the grade.*

This was a bit of speculation on Don's part, for he knew that the owners of the Greenville Carriage Works, now located in the small town of Greenville, thirty miles distant, were looking for a convenient building site close to

* On contracts for railroads, the railroads would not allow the contractor to dispose of the material excavated, where it would be expensive to the company. The present instance is an exception.

the new railway line, and he had made overtures to them on the subject, with every prospect of completing the deal in time.

Later on Don proposed to fill in a certain part of the lake shore within half a mile of the cut, which he and his brother had also acquired by purchase. On this made land they proposed to build a summer hotel, with tennis ground, bathing pavilion, and other modern improvements.

It was a warm spring day, and everything was progressing favorably with the grading work of the new railroad line.

Don had three gangs at work.

At the cut there were five Italian laborers under Joe Sinkey, the foreman.

This gang was employed in shifting the steam shovel when necessary, taking up and relaying the tracks for the cars, shifting loaded and unloaded cars, etc.

Besides these men there was the engineer of the stationary engine, the fireman and the cranesman.

The wages and other expenses of the outfit was about \$150 per week.

Besides, there were the engineers of the two locomotives and a dumping gang at the other end of the track.

The third gang, which was the largest, was working between the cut and the Lakeview terminal, along fairly level ground.

Don was here, there and everywhere where work was in progress.

After dinner on this particular day he was out at the cut giving sundry instructions to his brother, who for the present was anchored at that locality.

Then, feeling that he had a respite for awhile, he strolled over the foothills toward the cliff abutting on the lake. This cliff had to be tunneled at a certain point for the tracks to pass through.

This was the most delicate and difficult part of the contract, but it was a piece of work that appealed to Don's engineering tastes.

He was really very enthusiastic over the prospect of successfully piercing that wall of rock.

When Don reached the cliff he seated himself on a boulder in a nook among the rocks, and began to study the face of the projection which was to be penetrated by the drills.

He wondered how much labor and how many pounds of dynamite would be required to do the work properly within the lines of excavation as indicated by the plans.

"It will be a nice piece of work," he mused, as his eyes roved up and down the bare cliff. "Drilling and blasting must be conducted with all possible care to prevent shattering the roof and sides beyond the section lines."

Undoubtedly this was the most fascinating part of the contract for Don.

Fifty feet above where he sat the cliff projected in half-arch fashion over the surface of the lake.

Up there it was covered with a struggling mass of early vegetation, which shone brightly green in the afternoon sunlight.

A rough, irregular pathway pursued its sinuous course from the shore line to the top of the cliff.

One hundred feet from the edge of that airy height Don could just make out the roof of Jim Kelso's humble cottage.

The only sign of life in that vicinity was the wisp of hazy-looking smoke, which floated straight up in the air from the red brick chimney at the back of the house.

But as Don looked upward a sunbonnet came into view, and then by degrees the figure of a young girl in a check gown approached the edge of the cliff, standing there in the full glory of the sunshine.

"Good gracious!" gasped Don. "That's little blind Nellie. A step or two more and she will plunge to certain death among the rocks down here. How can I warn her?" and the boy stood up in great excitement.

But his anxious solicitude for the girl was really thrown away.

Nellie knew exactly where she was, although to her eyes the world was a blank.

Her senses of touch and of hearing were marvelous.

She knew every foot of the ground and the exact contour of the landscape for miles around the Kelso cottage.

The boy understood something about Nellie's remarkable perceptive faculties, but for all that he was startled by her apparent peril.

"Nellie," he shouted eagerly, "go back; you are on the very edge of the cliff."

The girl easily heard and recognized the voice as it was wafted up to her.

She looked down at him and smiled as though she really saw him.

"What are you doing down there, Donald Winthrop?" she asked, taking off her bonnet and swinging it lazily to and fro by one of its strings.

"I'm coming up to talk to you a moment," he said, suiting the action to the word, for it made him nervous to see her standing in so dangerous a spot.

"No, please don't," she replied, in a tone that brought him to a full pause all at once.

"And why not?" asked Don impetuously, for since the day, three months before, when he had thrashed Jerry Kelso for striking her in the face—a cowardly act that had made his blood boil at the time—he had often thought of the blind girl. Her unfortunate condition as the drudge of the Kelsons appealed to his chivalry, and he had looked forward to another meeting with her as a matter of great pleasure.

The girl turned toward the cottage before answering. Then she said:

"I'll come down."

With the fearlessness of one sure of her way, Nellie walked a dozen yards back along the edge of the cliff till she came to the beginning of the roughly-hewn pathway, which she seemed to recognize without difficulty, and then started to descend the face of the rock.

No one watching her movements, which were as light

and graceful as a fawn, would for a single moment have supposed her to be blind.

Don, too impatient to await her coming, sprang forward to meet her, and the girl knew he was coming from the moment he took his first step.

"Donald Winthrop, what an impetuous boy you are!" she exclaimed, with a winsome smile that lighted up as lovely a countenance as any painter could wish to transfer to canvas.

A sudden draught of air whistling about the cliff caught and blew out the unconfined tresses of her beautiful hair, and the sunlight transformed it into a mass of living, burnished gold.

"Impetuous, am I?" laughed Don, as he continued to advance to meet her. "To tell the truth, it gives me a chill to see you coming down this path in such a reckless manner."

"Why, there isn't any danger," replied the girl, in a tone of surprise.

"Isn't there? Well, I don't know about that. How can you know but the heavy rain of yesterday morning may have loosened a rock here and there?"

"But I am always very careful where I trust my feet, Don Winthrop," she said.

"I should judge by your movements that you are not half as careful as you ought to be."

"That's because you don't know me," she answered with a smile, as she placed her hand in his confidingly when she felt he was near to her.

"You are a truly wonderful girl, Nellie," said Don, with a sympathetic, almost tender, look down into her sightless eyes. "Surely you have not always been blind?"

"No," she replied sadly. "I had a fall which injured the optic nerve, so that I gradually lost my sight a few years ago."

She suffered him to seat her on the boulder which he had just vacated, and she sat there in silence for a moment or two, with her face turned toward the lake, while he sat by her side and studied the beautiful face in its frame of golden hair.

"If Mother Kelso or Jerry should chance to see us together I'm afraid there would be trouble," she said at length. "You are sure we are alone?"

"Yes, Nellie, quite alone," replied the boy, after a rapid glance around the lonesome spot.

"I am glad," she continued in an eager voice. "I wanted so much to see you, Donald Winthrop. You are building a railroad near here, are you not—you and your brother?"

"Yes, Nellie."

"And that is why you came here, I suppose—to look around?"

"Yes. We are going to blast a tunnel through the base of this cliff by and by, and I came over to study the looks of the place."

"Mr. Andrew Newman—that's the man Mr. Kelso works for—wanted to build this road, didn't he?"

"Yes," answered Don, rather surprised at her remark.

"I heard Mr. Kelso talking about it at the cottage. Mr. Newman is very angry because you got the contract, and"—she grasped Don's hand, while a little shudder agitated her—"I'm afraid you'll have trouble over the work. Mr. Kelso frightened me with the threats he used against you particularly."

"Why me in particular?"

"Because," and the boy saw the tears start in her beautiful eyes, "he hates you bitterly. He says he means to get square with you for taking my part that day Jerry struck me. And I—I have never had the chance to thank you sufficiently for your courage in coming to my assistance. But now I am sorry you did—so sorry—because Mr. Kelso is a harsh and unreasonable man, and I dread lest he do you an injury, and all on my account."

"Nonsense, Nellie! I can take care of myself. I don't fear Jim Kelso a little bit. And if I hear of Jerry Kelso abusing you again I'll give him another dressing-down, one that he won't soon forget."

"No, no; you mustn't," she said earnestly. "You don't know these people. They are very vindictive."

"I shall keep a bright lookout against any of their little tricks," answered Don, resolutely.

"I hope you will," she said, with evident anxiety, "for I am sure they mean you harm, Donald Winthrop. I heard Mr. Kelso say you had a gang of men excavating the hill yonder," and Nellie waved her hand in the direction of the cut. "He told Mother Kelso he meant to do something in that direction that would knock your operations out for awhile. You have an Italian there named Mike Rossi. You ought to watch him, for I am sure he is a very bad man. He used to work for Mr. Kelso. He was sent over to your place to get employment, and for no good purpose."

"I am much obliged to you, Nellie, for this warning," said Don gratefully. "I am looking for trouble from the Newman people, but of course cannot tell in what shape it is likely to come. I shall have this Rossi spotted, and if we catch him up to any funny business I'll have him in jail so quick that it'll make his head swim."

"I'm so glad of this chance to tell you these things," said the blind girl, looking up in Don's face. "I should feel very miserable if any harm happened to—you."

"And I am very grateful to you for interesting yourself in my behalf," replied the handsome young contractor. "I wish I could do something for you in return. I can't understand why a girl of your gentle nature is willing to put up with the life you lead with the Kelsos. You ought to leave them. My mother would be glad to offer you a home, while I—"

"No, no," replied the girl, with a frightened look. "I dare not leave them."

"Dare not!" exclaimed Don, impetuously. "Why?" The girl looked at him appealingly.

"Tell me," urged the boy, earnestly, "has this Jim Kelso any claim upon you?"

"You must not ask me—indeed you must not!" she cried with a look of fear.

"Are you a relative of his?"

"No," she answered reluctantly.

"Then what possible hold can he have on you?"

Nellie only bent her head, and Don could see the tears stealing down her cheeks.

The sympathy he had all along felt for this gentle creature came to the surface with great warmth.

He bent over her and seized her little hands.

"There's some mystery in this, little girl. Why will you not trust me? I will be your friend. Tell me what the trouble is. Nellie, I insist on knowing."

Nellie sprang up with a suppressed scream and clung to Don's arm.

The boy turned quickly about, to find Jim Kelso standing within a few feet of them, regarding him with a look as black as thundergust.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIGHT AT THE FOOT OF THE CLIFF.

"Well," said Don, with a dignity that was natural to him, "what have you got to say about this matter, anyway?"

"What have I got to say?" said Kelso, with a sneer. "I've a good bit to say. Go home, gal," he added fiercely, turning to Nellie. "If I ketch you talkin' to this chap agin it won't be good for ye—understand?"

"Good-by, Don Winthrop," said Nellie, giving him her hand, which trembled visibly in his grasp.

"Good-by, Nellie," Don answered, without making any attempt to detain her, which he judged would have brought down on her gentle head the anger of her tyrants.

The blind girl turned slowly away and began the ascent of the cliff, passing within arm's length of Kelso.

Don watched the man like a hawk, fearing he would strike the girl.

Had he done so, and his eyes seemed to indicate such an intention, there would have been trouble; Don was in no mood to stand for such an exhibition of brutality.

But Jim Kelso allowed Nellie to pass him unharmed.

It is possible he scented danger in the young engineer's face and preferred not to provoke a quarrel, strong and rugged as he undoubtedly was.

Evidently the man was not looking for a personal encounter at that moment.

"Now you kin go," he said, turning a malevolent look on the boy.

"Can I?" replied Don, with a short laugh, which in its way was a sort of danger signal. "Since when have you constituted yourself the arbiter of my movements?"

"None of your blamed business! I don't want ye hanging 'round here chinnin' to that there gal; do you understand?"

"I wasn't aware that you had any control over this ground," replied Don sarcastically.

"I have control over that gal, and I won't stand for a gent like you puttin' any nonsense into her head—that's what I mean. You struck my son Jerry three weeks ago because he gave the gal a tap on the cheek for talkin'

sassy to him, and I want ye to understand that I don't care for ye to repeat it," and Kelso nodded his head in a significant manner.

"I struck your son because he was behaving like a brute and refused to desist when I asked him to. He's big and husky enough to defend himself without calling on you."

That was quite true, although Jerry Kelso was but seventeen; but, like most bullies, he was a rank coward, and Don knew it.

"What was that gal sayin' to ye when I came up?" asked Kelso, suddenly changing the subject.

"Why do you want to know?" replied Don, looking him squarely in the eye.

"'Cause I reckon it's my business to know," answered the foreman doggedly.

"Well, you won't learn from me."

"Then I'll make her tell me," said Kelso, with an ugly scowl.

"And suppose she won't—what then?"

"Don't you worry; I'll find a way to open her mouth," he said significantly.

"Look here, Jim Kelso," said Don, walking squarely up to him; "do you know what I think of you?"

"No, nor I don't keer."

"Don't you? Well, I've just got one word to say to you on that subject, and if you know when you're well off you'll heed what I say. Don't let me hear of you laying the weight of your hand on that girl. I mean it. For as sure as there is a heaven above I'll teach you a lesson you won't forget as long as you live."

"You'll do what?" roared the foreman, doubling up his brawny fist.

"I'll take it out of your hide, if that's plain enough English."

"Why, I kin eat you up, you soft-faced dude!" ejaculated Kelso furiously. "Do ye see that arm?" and he rolled up the sleeve of his red flannel shirt, exposing a great, hairy arm, which bristled with muscle and sinew. "If I hit ye with that you'd be a fit subject for the coroner, d'ye understand?"

If Jim Kelso thought this display of his strength would intimidate Don Winthrop he was greatly mistaken.

"I see you've been drinking," said Don, coolly, "and I prefer not to have any trouble with you; but—"

"What if I have been drinkin'? That's my bizness. If I go up yonder an' kick the head off'n that gal if she won't open her face when I ask her a question, that's my bizness, too," snarled the foreman, squirting a stream of tobacco juice within an inch of the young engineer's shoe.

"You'll find out that I'll make it my business if I hear of you doing any harm to her. Why, nobody but a brute would raise his hand against any woman, let alone a little blind girl like Nellie."

"Yah!" snarled Kelso, showing his tobacco-stained teeth like a famished hyena. "I've a mind to smash your face for you."

"I've dealt with brutes like you before, so I wouldn't

advise you to try it," said the boy, with exasperating coolness.

"Curse you!" cried the man, flaring up like a flash of gunpowder and thrusting his rough fist within an' inch of Don's face, "if ye git me goin' I'll wipe the earth with ye till there won't be enough left of ye to make a respectable funeral."

"Take your hand away!" cried Don sharply, without moving a muscle.

The ruffian half complied, and then, as though ashamed of his action, he suddenly slapped the boy across the mouth, making the remark:

"Take that for—"

But he got no farther.

With a spring Don planted his fist squarely between the man's eyes, and the fellow fell back in a heap among the rocks.

In a moment he sat up and looked around in a dazed sort of way.

Then, with an oath, he sprang to his feet.

His face was distorted with passion, and blood was trickling from a cut behind his ear, where his head had come in contact with a rock.

"I'll kill you for that!" he shouted hoarsely, rushing at Don, his face convulsed with all the evil instincts of his nature.

Smash!

The boy leaped aside with the agility of a cat, and at the same time planted a swift hook under the rascal's jaw which sent his head back with a snap and rattled every tooth in his jaws.

The blow stopped him for a second; then he came at Don like a whirlwind, evidently intending to annihilate him on the spot.

But the boy, who was as cool as an iceberg, ducked with wonderful quickness, and as Kelso's fist shot past into empty air, throwing him partly off his balance, Don turned and hit him a swinging blow under the left ear, sending the brawny fellow staggering away.

No one but an adept at the science of sparring could have handled the muscular foreman with the ease and precision the young engineer displayed.

"Ye kin fight, kin ye!" gritted Jim Kelso, now thoroughly aroused to the work cut out for him. "Let me hit ye one blow, an' I'll knock it all out of you quickerin' greased lightnin'."

This time he came at the boy with more caution; but his blows were parried with wonderful skill, and he got a couple of smashes in the face, either of which would have floored an ordinary man. But in his case they merely stopped him for a moment.

In the mix-up which followed Don received one glancing blow, while he pummeled his opponent right and left in the face and chest.

Kelso, now bleeding from a cut on the mouth, looked like a savage as he advanced again, this time fully determined to have his revenge for the punishment he had received.

"I'll have no mercy on ye if I once git ye into my clutches!" he snarled, with a grim ferocity which boded ill for the boy unless he could keep the ruffian off.

Don again cleverly ducked a straight one aimed at his head.

Biff!

He opened a second cut on Kelso's lip.

With an oath the foreman recovered himself quickly and struck the boy a staggering blow on the chest that sent him back a yard or two.

"Yah! Now I have ye!" roared the ruffian with a triumphant grin, following up his advantage with a blind rush and swing of his arms.

But Don was not where Kelso thought he was.

Smash! Crash!

The lad's hard knuckles rattled his jaws again, and the foreman turned fairly livid with disappointed rage.

For the next five minutes the young engineer seemed to hit the rascal where he pleased without receiving a scratch in return, though the fellow tried his prettiest to land a knockout and took his punishment in grim silence. Kelso's countenance was battered and bloody by this time, but this was no new experience for him.

He was as fit to continue the fight as if he had never been struck.

Don, too, was in prime condition.

He scarcely seemed to be breathing out of the ordinary, in spite of his recent exertions.

But his blood was thoroughly up by this time.

He also realized that he had a hard proposition on his hands.

"I've fooled with him long enough," he muttered under his breath. "It's time I polished him off if I'm ever going to do it."

With this resolve he now assumed the aggressive and went at Kelso like a young cyclone.

This change in tactics astonished and confounded the foreman, whose defence was feeble and ineffective.

He was staggered by the swings, cuts and hooks, which seemed to strike him like lightning flashes.

Kelso, in his blind fury, tried to land an effective blow, but not one seemed to reach.

Smash!

This time Don caught him plumb in the left eye.

Thud!

The boy's left bruised his flat nose.

Biff!

Straight from the shoulder Don landed on the point of the rascal's jaw.

This was what he had been aiming for.

Jim Kelso went down like an ox under the sledge-hammer.

It was a clean knockout, and the foreman had no further interest in the proceedings.

"Well, he's got his medicine at last," said the stalwart young engineer, calmly wiping the blood from his bleeding knuckles while he looked down on his semi-conscious adversary. "And it serves you well right, you brute! Let

me hear of you touching a hair of Nellie's bright little head and I'll not leave a feature on your ugly face for your wife to recognize you by!"

Thus speaking, Don turned on his heel and left the foreman lying where he had fallen, to recover at his own sweet convenience.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ALARM OVER THE TELEPHONE.

"What's the matter with your hands, Don?" asked his brother Gil, as the young engineer reappeared at the cut after more than an hour's absence.

"I met Jim Kelso and had a little argument with him. I rather guess he came in for the short end of it," replied the boy grimly.

Gil looked surprised, but said nothing further on the subject.

"The shovel seems to be doing its duty well," said Don, after watching the machine and its work for a few minutes.

"Yes, it's a dandy, all right. By the way, we came near having an accident soon after you left—one that would have delayed us awhile."

"How was that?"

"One of the fishplates on the track here worked loose, and, oddly enough, the spikes that should have been placed in to hold that particular rail were found to be missing. The locomotive would have been derailed when she started ahead with the loaded cars had not Sinkey fortunately detected the trouble in time."

"It didn't strike you that this thing might have been done designedly by one of the Italians when this section of track was relaid this morning, eh?"

Gil looked at his brother in a startled way.

"Why, of course not," he said. "What put that idea into your head?"

"I believe there's a man named Mike Rossi working in this gang, isn't there?" said Don, regarding his brother intently.

"Yes. Sinkey employed him a day or two ago to replace one of the Italians who left rather suddenly and without giving notice."

"Very well. You want to have Rossi closely watched from this out."

"Do you suspect—" began Gil.

"I have information to the effect that he was sent here by Newman to do as much damage to us as he could without getting caught at it."

"Hadn't he better be discharged at once?"

"No. I have an object in keeping him. Of course he doesn't know that we're on to him, and it is probable that we shall be able to spot him at some of his funny business. It is more than likely that he is responsible for the loosening of the fishplate and the absence of the spikes."

"I'll have a talk with Sinkey on the subject," said Gil. "He's got a pretty sharp eye. There isn't much that escapes him."

"All right; I'll leave the matter with you. I'm going down to inspect what Al Boggs and his men are doing."

Soon after work stopped for the day Gil walked into the office on Main street, and found his brother clicking a letter off on the typewriter.

"Gee! I'm tired, all right," said the boy, throwing himself on one of the leather-covered chairs with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Nothing fresh to report, I suppose?" said Don, without stopping the deft movement of his fingers, which were now puffed up and swollen after the fight under the shadow of the cliff.

"No. Sinkey has got a man he can trust to keep tab on Rossi's movements during the day, while Mike Doyle, our watchman, will have an eye out for him after dark."

"That's right," nodded the real head of the firm, as he drew the finished letter out of the machine and glanced over it before affixing his signature.

"To-morrow is our first payday on the work, and I'm bound to say I feel encouraged with the way the job is progressing," said Gil, with a lazy smile.

"Yes, everything is running nicely," admitted Don, as he folded the letter and enclosed it in the addressed envelope. "By the way, here is a letter from the carriage company. One of their representatives will be over to-morrow to inspect the site I have offered them."

"It will be some time before it's filled in."

"That doesn't cut any ice. They want to see how far it is from the proposed freight yard. Then the vice-president is going to interview the general manager of the D. P. & Q. with reference to the laying down of a spur track into the property. They want to ship direct from the new factory to the cars."

"I guess they'll get what they want if their business justifies it."

"Well, I understand it's the biggest carriage works in the State."

"We ought to make a good thing out of that deal if it goes through."

"I can't see any reason why it shouldn't go through. It's an ideal spot for their business."

"It was a bright idea of yours to buy that ground, which did not look to be good for anything. Newman won't be pleased to hear of this little coup."

"Newman won't be pleased with a good many things before we get through with the railroad contract," said Don grimly.

"I'm sure he calculates on doing us up. He was standing at the door of his office as I came along, and he favored me with one of his sarcastic smiles that mean a heap in their way. I heard he is preparing to put in a bid on the new sewer authorized at a recent meeting of the town council."

"He's welcome to it. He needs the work, if he can get it. All I ask of him is to keep his hands off our affairs. If he should have any dirty trick brought home to him he's likely to find himself behind the bars. I'm going to take every precaution to head off any crooked work on

the part of that crowd. What I gave Jim Kelso to-day is a sample of how I treat brutes of his caliber."

"By the way, you haven't told me how you came to have the mix-up with him this afternoon."

Whereupon Don told his brother the whole story of his meeting with blind Nellie, her warning of premeditated foul play on the part of the Newman crowd, Kelso's unexpected appearance on the scene, and what led up to the row.

"Such fellows as he are the scum of the earth," said Gil, "and I hoped you knocked some sense into his thick head."

"I'm afraid he's a hopeless case. You can't make a silk purse out of a swine's ear. He'll never be any different than what he is, though he may haul in his horns more frequently than has been his custom."

"He looks to me as if he possessed a certain low cunning which finds its best opportunity in the dark."

"He certainly won't tackle either one of us hereafter in the open. His proper habitat is the State prison, and it's a wonder to me he hasn't fetched up there long before this."

"He'll get there, if in the meantime he doesn't do something that'll put his head inside a noose."

"Do you know, Gil, that I can't get that blind girl out of my head? Strange, isn't it, that as long as she's lived down yonder with the Kelsoes I should only have seen her but once before yesterday, and both occasions resulted in a muss with a member of that family."

"Why, I never seen her at all. They keep her pretty close, I guess."

"There's some mystery in it, you can take my word for it," remarked Don, nodding his head sagely.

"What sort of a girl is she?" asked his brother curiously.

"What sort?" replied Don. "Any description I might give wouldn't do her justice. You know once on a time, long ago, you and I used to speculate on the personality of the angels as we saw them in religious pictures. They seemed to be largely of the feminine gender, as I remember it. Well, Nellie is as close a realization of what an angel is, or ought to be, as I could express the idea."

"You excite my curiosity, Don. I will certainly have to catch sight of her and see if we can agree on that point as we do on most everything else," smiled Gil.

"I'm afraid you won't find that an easy matter. The Kelsoes have us marked. Besides, they'll be skittish lest the girl may hear something of the schemes they propose to put in force against the new line and find means of putting us on our guard against them."

"I dare say you're right."

"Whatever influence they bring to bear on the girl, it seems effective enough to serve their purpose. She clearly stands in great fear of them; otherwise, I'm sure she would have given them the slip long ago, since she needn't go any further than this town to find people whose sympathies would easily be enlisted in her behalf. It's a great pity she's in their clutches, and I shall not rest easy until I see if something cannot be done to break the connection."

And it was clear that Don meant every word he said.

At that moment the telephone bell rang and Don walked over to the instrument.

"Hello!" he said, putting the receiver to his ear.

"Yes," he added in reply to some question.

"What's that?" he exclaimed a moment later, in some little excitement.

"Well, do the best you can. I'll be right out," and he hung up the receiver.

"What's the matter?" asked Gil.

"One of the buildings out at the cut has caught fire," replied Don hurriedly, "and Phil Mead thinks it's liable to prove serious."

But Don had seized his hat and was half way across the street to the stable wheré he kept his horse.

CHAPTER V.

MORE TROUBLE.

A few minutes later Don was dashing down the street on his way to the scene of the reported trouble.

As soon as he cleared the town he made out a quantity of smoke rising into the air from the direction of the cut.

He put his horse to his best pace and rapidly covered the three miles which intervened.

"If this is a trick of the enemy," he muttered between his clenched lips, "there's going to be trouble for some one."

Before Don had gone half the distance the smoke, which, had been quite heavy at first, began to clear away.

As there was no sign of flames the boy began to feel encouraged.

"I guess Mead and the Italians have managed to gain control of the fire in time to save the building."

And such he found to be the fact when he reached the ground.

"The laborers were at their supper when I noticed a suspicious looking glare through one of the upper windows of the place where the men bunk," explained Mead, the man in charge of the stationary engine. "I hurried upstairs and found one of the closets all ablaze and the fire breaking out through the roof. I pitched the three hand extinguishers that hung against the wall into the closet; but there was something wrong with two of them, for only one broke, and that had but a momentary effect on the fire. I then rushed for the metal extinguisher downstairs, routing out the men and forming them into a bucket brigade on the way. As matters looked decidedly shaky, I thought I'd try and reach you over the private wire if I could. I am glad to say that the big extinguisher and the laborers, who hustled for all they were worth, put us out of danger before matters got beyond control. You'd better go up and look at it. There's a hole in the roof as big as the head of a small tank, and you might back a freight car into the upper northeast corner of the building if the hole were on the ground floor."

Don looked the damage over, and saw that it could be easily and quickly put to rights again, and he felt very much relieved to find that the trouble was no worse.

He telephoned the facts to his brother, and asked him to arrange to have a couple of carpenters and the necessary materials out at the cut the first thing in the morning.

Then he asked Mead if he had any suspicions as to how the fire started.

"No, sir; I can't say as I have."

The same question was put to Mike Doyle, the night watchman.

He shook his head.

"I have orders to keep me eye on that Rossi; but I can't be in half a dozen places at once. When the alarm was given I noticed he was eating supper with the rest of the Italians, so I don't think he had anything to do with the fire."

"Well, it's very singular," remarked Don. "I examined the remains of the closet thoroughly, and there seems to be a strong smell of kerosene mixed with the odor of burned wood. Now, there should not be any kerosene out here."

"Not a drop, sir. As ye are aware, we use signal oil altogether for the lamps, and sure that has a different smell from kerosene."

"Evidently a deliberate attempt has been made to destroy the building," said the young engineer, knitting his brows. "You'll have to keep a brighter lookout than ever. Remember to report at once the slightest suspicious movement on the part of that man Rossi. But don't let him get the idea that he's watched."

"All right, sir; ye kin depend on me."

Don then returned to Lakeview.

That night Mike Doyle found an empty can, which had undoubtedly recently held kerosene oil, in a clump of bushes fifty feet from the laborers' quarters, and he reported the fact to Gil Winthrop when he appeared at the cut in the morning, showing him the can.

"It certainly points strongly to the fire being of incendiary origin," said Gil. "But it is a poor clew to detect the rascal who brought it out here."

Everything went swimmingly for a week on the railroad job, and payday came around again.

Rossi was observed to be pretty thick with the men, but beyond that there was no fault to be found with him. He was constantly shadowed, for Don Winthrop had resolved to take no chances.

Most contractors would probably have got rid of the Italian on general principles, but Don had an idea that if he caught the fellow in any crooked work he might be able to frighten him into a confession, which would implicate whoever was behind the man, thus striking an effective blow at the conspirators who were working against him in the dark.

Gil paid off the men at the proper time. There were thirty-six Italians in the different gangs, and about the time he had finished all of them went into supper as usual.

Without the slightest suspicion that anything out of the ordinary was brewing the boy started back to town.

He put up the horse and buggy and joined his brother at the office preparatory to going home for dinner.

They had their hats on and were going out of the door, when the telephone jingled. Don, as usual, answered the call.

The news that came over the wire from Mike Doyle was that every laborer on the job had taken his bag and lit out as soon as the crowd had finished their meal.

"By jove," exclaimed Don, in a tone of disgust, "if this isn't enough to make a man mad! This thing happens just at the moment I was preparing to put on an extra spurt."

"What's up now, Don?" asked Gil, from the doorway.

"More trouble," responded his brother.

"Anything happened to the machinery?" asked Gil, in an anxious voice.

"No, nothing of that sort."

"What, then?"

"All of our laborers have deserted us in a body."

"The dickens you say!" replied Gil.

"That's the news Doyle sends over the 'phone."

"Then we're at a complete standstill."

"That's about the size of it. Of course, this is Newman's work, and it seems to be pretty evident Rossi has engineered the break-up. Some strong inducement must have been offered the men to quit. We have treated them well, and I haven't heard a squeal from them since they went to work for us."

"We'll have to advertise for new men, of course," said Gil, with a frown.

"We'll have to get them somehow. It's lucky I engaged twenty extra men yesterday from Pittsburg. They were for the fourth gang I intended to put to work beyond the cut. I sent Joe Sinkey on to-night to meet them at Glendale. He will have a couple of wagons and fetch them over the first thing in the morning. This will give us a lift; otherwise we should have come to a dead stop."

"I forgot all about the new men," said Gil, brightening up. "Newman won't have such a laugh on us, after all."

"Sit down a moment. I'm going to call up Pittsburg on the long-distance 'phone and order another batch of laborers, if they are to be got offhand. If not I'll connect with that Italian paper in New York and put in another advertisement."

"I'd give something to know what Newman is going to do with the crowd he took away from us to-night. I haven't heard that he's started any fresh job."

"He might put them to work on the road across the lake," suggested Don, while waiting for the connection to be made with Pittsburg, "and so hurry the job along."

"Well, I'll bet this low-down trick will cost him something in the way of a bonus. He'll have to make good whatever inducements Rossi held out to them, else you'll see them trooping back and begging to be taken on again."

Ten minutes later Don hung up the receiver with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Zotorello has promised to send on thirty-five additional laborers at once," he said to his brother; "so we shall not lose so very much over this wholesale desertion."

"Glad to hear it. I was afraid I shouldn't have any

appetite for my dinner," said Gil, with a cheerful smile. "On the whole, I'm glad to get rid of Rossi. He's one of the slickest rascals I ever came across, and I never felt that things were exactly safe while he was about."

"He hasn't done so much harm, when you come to look at it."

"He was watched too close for that."

"I dare say he got on to that fact, and the card he worked to-night was about the only safe trick he dared spring on us."

"And that has practically failed of the desired result."

"We shall know better about that in the morning."

And they did, for about seven the next morning, while the boys were at breakfast, a despatch was delivered at the house from Joe Sinkey, who was in Glendale. It was to the effect that he had been arrested on the charge of disorderly conduct just as the train came in, and was locked-up—evidently a put-up job to corral the new laborers and spirit them away.

"Well, that's tough," remarked Don, tossing the despatch over to his brother. "It's plain I'll have to go to Glendale."

CHAPTER VI.

BLOCKING THE ENEMY.

Don Winthrop took the morning boat down the lake, arriving at Glendale about ten o'clock.

He found Sinkey had just been discharged for lack of evidence.

At the railroad station not one of the imported laborers from Pittsburg was in sight.

"How did it happen?" asked the young engineer of his foreman.

"I hardly know myself," explained Sinkey. "I reached here last evening about nine with the wagons, and put up at the Glendale House. I was called at 4.30, and had the wagons here waiting for the train due at 5.45. I heard the whistle of the locomotive at Parson's bridge, and walked forward to where I supposed the smoker would pull up, when without warning I was suddenly surrounded by at least a dozen men, and found myself hustled off the platform and down the street, the center of what appeared to be a free fight. Somebody fetched an officer, and the crowd scattered like magic. The policemen arrested me, in spite of my urgent protest, and I was locked up. The magistrate discharged me as soon I was brought before him and had stated my side of the case. He also reprimanded the officer for making the arrest. There is not any doubt in my mind that the Newman crowd found out we expected the Italians, and put up the job to eucrue us out of them."

Don was evidently of the same opinion.

His eyes flashed and he set his jaws together with a snap.

"Newman has scored a couple of points on me, but I'll give him all the fight he wants before I get through with him. If he imagines that he can stop me on this railroad

contract and prevent me finishing it on time he's got another think coming."

"His crowd have got away with the men, all right," said Sinkey, dejectedly.

"I'm going to find out where they've gone," answered Don, in a determined tone. "I don't propose to stand for it if I can help it."

He questioned the two drivers who had come over from Lakeview with Joe Sinkey. They were hanging around the station awaiting developments.

"Quite a crowd of men got off on the platform as soon as the train came in," spoke up one of the drivers. "They stood around chattering and gesticulating like a lot of cats in a strange garret. Miggs and me, of course, looked for Sinkey to round them up and load 'em aboard the teams. But the first thing we knew three or four chaps came up, spoke to 'em in their own lingo, and started them in a procession down the track as soon as the train pulled out. That's the last we've seen of 'em."

"In what direction?" asked Don.

"That way," and the driver waved his hand toward the north end of the lake.

The young engineer thought a moment; then he got busy.

"You're acquainted in Glendale," he said to the foreman. "I suppose you could drum up half a dozen stout chaps who wouldn't mind a little strenuous exercise if well paid for it?"

"I can get 'em in ten minutes," replied Sinkey.

"Do so then."

Within a quarter of an hour Joe returned with seven stalwart fellows.

He lined them up before his boss, who made them an offer for their services, and explained to them what might be expected of them in an emergency.

They accepted Don's proposition with alacrity.

"Get aboard these wagons, then," ordered the boy tersely.

They obeyed like a lot of young colts.

Don joined the driver of the leading vehicle and directed him to move down the road beside the track at a lively gait.

"They have four hours the start of us, and will probably have reached their destination before we can catch up with them. All the same, there will be something doing if I can locate them, even if I have to go into the midst of the enemy's camp," said he.

A long, dusty ride of two hours followed, with nothing to vary the monotony of the trip.

Then a sudden turn in the road brought them unexpectedly into the presence of a score of Italian laborers squatted in the shade of a line of trees.

Five men, not Italians, were gathered in a knot a little distance away, talking and smoking, while a whisky flask passed from mouth to mouth.

Apparently the five were feeling uncommonly good.

"Those are our men for a nickel!" said Don, turning in his seat and shouting back to Sinkey.

"They look like the fellows I saw on the platform,"

nodded the driver. "But I am not sure, for all Italians look alike to me."

All hands prepared for action, and as the wagons drew up before the outfit under the trees Sinkey's boys tumbled out into the road and awaited orders.

"Hello! What's all this mean?" demanded the leader of the party, as Don stepped down from his perch beside the driver.

He knew well enough what it meant without asking, but of course he and his associates were prepared to resist the efforts of the young engineer to recover his imported laborers.

"I came after these men," replied Don curtly, "and I'm going to take them back to Glendale with me."

"You are like fun!" returned the man insolently.

"Well, you heard what I said," said Don, with fire in his eyes. "These Italians came down here to work on the railroad. I hired them in Pittsburg. You and your pals were sent to Glendale to steal them away, and you succeeded, after a fashion. Now I propose to recover them. Peaceably, if I can—by force if necessary."

"You can't bulldoze me in that fashion!" snorted the leader of the opposition.

Then he rushed to the Italians, but found Sinkey talking to the men in their native language.

The foreigners were all on their feet, jabbering like a tree full of monkeys. They stared awkwardly about, not in the least comprehending the situation.

Sinkey, however, was bringing order out of chaos, when the other leader interfered and brought his own Italian lingo into play.

Sinkey ordered the laborers to get into the wagons, and some of them started to obey.

Evidently they were tired of walking, and a ride had its allurements.

More followed, in spite of the protests of the opposition, and things seemed to be going Don's way.

This angered the Irishman who was the emissary of Andrew Newman, and he suddenly struck Sinkey and knocked him down.

Joe jumped to his feet and went for him.

The others came up to help their companion. Don's seven supporters headed them off, and a general mix-up ensued, to the amusement of the laborers, all of whom had now obtained points of vantage on the wagons.

The scrap was not of long duration, for the Newman crowd were clearly outgeneraled and outnumbered.

"You haven't heard the last of this!" roared the man who headed the opposition bunch, shaking his fist at Don Winthrop when his adherents gave up the fight.

"It's a poor rule that won't work both ways," replied the boy, sententiously. "I know you're Mike Mullen, Andrew Newman's foreman on the road work, and I want you to tell your boss that if he continues to look for trouble in our direction he'll get into it, right up to his neck."

With these words he mounted beside the driver of the first team.

"Yah!" snarled Mullen, picking up a stone and making a motion to fling it at the young engineer.

Don was down in an instant.

He walked straight up to the fellow, and looking him in the eye, said:

"Maybe you've heard how I treated your friend Jim Kelso last week. That's how I deal with scum of your sort. Do you understand? Put down that stone, or I won't leave a whole bone in your body!"

Mullen drew back, thoroughly cowed.

He had not heard anything about Kelso being knocked out by Don.

Jim was not such a fool as to spread the news about.

But Newman's confidential foreman bore signs, too evident to be mistaken, of having been through a serious scrap with somebody; and Mullen had heard more than once that Don Winthrop was a scientific slugger of no mean order.

Where he would have called one of his own set a liar on the spot, he accepted the boy's statement without question.

If this young engineer could whip Jim Kelso, he knew better than to invite a scrap on his own account.

So he turned on his heel with a smothered oath, and motioning to his companions, the crowd started off down the road.

Then Don remounted the wagon, and the victorious party drove off in the direction of Glendale, where they arrived in time to catch the three o'clock boat for Lakeview.

CHAPTER VII.

STRUCK DOWN.

Work was resumed next morning at the cut, and, in a small way, all along the line.

Don had already been advised that thirty-five laborers had left Pittsburg en route for Lakeview. This time he determined to take no chances with them, so he went over to Glendale by boat and took an early afternoon train for Fairfax, where he expected to connect with the train carrying the Italians.

They came through in a smoking car.

Don alternated between the platform and a seat near the door.

He had to keep on watch, as the train, which was a local, made frequent stops. He could not tell but an agent of Andrew Newman might make his appearance at any moment and try to coax the laborers to light out for parts unknown.

However, nothing of that kind occurred during the run to Glendale, and so Don got his men aboard the steamer and up to Lakeview all right.

And now work progressed with more rapidity than ever before.

During the ensuing month great progress was made at the cut and along the road between that point and Lakeview.

A new gang was put to work under a man named Far-

rell. They were grading the line between the upper end of the spur of the hill and the cliff where the tunnel was to be bored.

Everything was running smoothly, and Don had begun to hope that Newman had finally concluded to keep his hands off.

"Nothing like handling men of his stamp without gloves," he said to his brother one day, when he felt in a particularly happy frame of mind over the situation.

"That's right," agreed Gil, with a boyish grin.

"Mr. Harley seems perfectly satisfied with the work as far as it has gone," said Don, in a contented tone.

Mr. Harley was the engineer in charge of the D. P. & Q., and he had just been over that part of the line under construction.

Don had all his carts at work, either clearing the land between the right-of-way boundaries or carting the waste excavation taken out above where the shovel was employed in the cut. Trees and brush had to be cut close to the surface of the ground and then burned or otherwise disposed of. The excavated soil was taken down to the lake and dumped in the spot where the boys proposed to build their summer hotel.

"Next week," Don went on, "I'll have the drills down here, and we'll make a beginning on the cliff rock."

Gil nodded, as the idea struck him favorably. He liked to see things humming at all points.

"How about the factory people and the carriage site? We are filling in the ground fast now, and it is beginning to look something like a plot. I thought the vice-president was coming over this morning?"

"Didn't I mention the fact to you? No? Well, he was at the office at eleven o'clock, according to appointment. He handed me a check for \$500 and took a sixty-day option on the property. It's practically a sale. We paid only \$800 for the ground as it then stood. Our profit will be over \$4,000, and we shall not have held it over four months at the outside."

Gil's eyes sparkled.

"All things come to those who have long heads—meaning you, for I never would have thought of that scheme."

"Well, it's all in the firm, Gil," replied Don, patting his brother affectionately on the back. "By the way, have you managed to catch sight of Nellie yet?"

Gil shook his head.

"No; I was on the top of the cliff this morning, within a stone's throw of the Kelso cottage, but she was not to be seen."

"I guessed as much," said his brother, stroking his chin thoughtfully. "But I must say I am disappointed. I wanted to hear how she was doing. I don't trust Jim Kelso for a red cent. He's capable of a whole lot of villainy."

"A woman, whom I judged to be Mrs. Kelso, piped me off, all right. She's got a face that would turn milk sour on sight."

"I dare say she's well worthy of Jim. It makes my blood boil to think that poor girl is under the thumb of

such a couple—not to speak of Jerry, who is capable of browbeating the life out of her."

"It certainly is a shame," admitted Gil; "but I don't see that we have any right to interfere."

"That remains to be seen. I've taken an interest in that girl, and I don't purpose to see her abused if I can help it," said Don, in a decided tone.

Gil said no more on the subject.

He felt sorry for the girl, as he might have felt for any one whom he believed to be entitled to his sympathy; but he did not have the same interest in her that Don had.

"Well, I've got some directions to give Farrell," said Don, preparing to mount his horse. "I'll see you on my way back."

"You had better hurry, then, for it looks like rain."

"Pooh! A little water won't hurt me," laughed the boy, as he gave his animal the rein.

There was a trail running around the spur of the hill through which the cut was being excavated.

This came close to the margin of the lake at one spot, and then made a detour along the base of the hills in the direction of the cliff.

Don cantered along without paying any attention to the ominous appearance of the heavens, which threatened a good shower, if not worse.

To say the truth, he was thinking of blind Nellie.

He was wondering how things were going with her since the day he knocked Jim Kelso out under the cliff.

The boy was far more interested in the beautiful and unfortunate girl than he was willing to admit to himself.

As he approached the curve in the trail near the lake it began to rain a bit.

This aroused him, and he urged his animal to a more rapid pace.

The clouds seemed to be closing in on the landscape, which took on a particularly dreary aspect.

There was nothing to be seen but the leaden-colored water on the one side. The brush-covered hills were on the other, the white face of the cliff coming into view in the distance.

Don observed a stout boat drawn in close to the shore, and was somewhat surprised to see it there.

The rain continued to fall at intervals until he came up with Farrell and his gang.

A string of carts were plodding to and coming back from the lake shore.

Farrell came up as soon as he saw him.

"Let me have your plan," said Don, alighting from his horse.

The foreman took it from his pocket.

"There's going to be some change here," said the boy, indicating the spot on the blue print. "Mr. Harley was speaking to me about it awhile ago. The culvert over that little stream will go here, instead of there. The course of the waterway seems to have been altered a bit by the late spring rains, and we have to provide for that by running the embankment a yard or so to the right. See?"

"I understand, sir."

"I'm going to send you a dozen more men to-morrow to push this thing along, for I'm going to get at the cliff right away. Some of the men who deserted us a month ago have applied for work, and I'm going to take them on. The steam drills and the boiler will be brought up by the end of the week."

"All right, sir."

Don spent three-quarters of an hour with Farrell, by which time it was beginning to grow dark.

"I'll be out here some time in the morning," said the young engineer, as he rode off, taking the trail back the way he came.

The rain, which had held off during his stay with the upper gang, now began to come down in earnest.

"It's plain that I'll be soaked before I get back to the cut," soliloquized Don.

He put the spurs to his horse and galloped along at a good pace.

As the animal was taking the turn at the point nearest to the lake he suddenly shied, almost throwing the boy.

"Whoa, Prince!" he exclaimed soothingly. "What's the matter, old boy?"

Then somebody sprang out of the gloom and seized the horse by the bridle.

Two Italians appeared on the other side and grabbed hold of Don.

"Hello! What's this?" he exclaimed, striking at one with his short whip.

Something very like a big stone struck him on the head from behind, and he fell forward on his horse's neck unconscious.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE QUARRY ON JUMBO ISLAND.

Don Winthrop was roughly pulled out of the saddle, and while one of his assailants held up his limp form another tied his hands behind his back.

Then he was carried down to the water's edge and lifted into a boat which lay there. His horse was turned loose.

There were three men, two of whom were Italians, and a stout boy in the party.

All embarked without delay, and the small craft was pushed off and headed out into the lake.

"I reckon I've got him dead to rights at last," said the coarse voice of Jim Kelso from the stern of the boat.

"That's what you have, dad," sneered his estimable son Jerry, who sat straddle-legged above the unconscious prisoner.

"You fixa him all right dissa time," spoke up one of the rowers, Tony Gulla by name, who was a sort of under-foreman in Andrew Newman's employ.

"You kin jest bet I will," replied Kelso, with an oath. "When I get through with him his name will be mud."

"You maka him eata da humble pie, eh?" grinned Gulla.

Kelso made no answer to this, and for awhile nothing was heard but the rumble of the oars in the locks and

the swish of the rain as it was driven against their unprotected persons by the wind.

"Say, dad," chipped in Jerry, at last, "do I get a whack at him? I owe him one for the knockdown he gave me awhile back."

"Don't you worry," growled his father; "he'll get all that's coming to him, and more, too!"

The young ruffian grinned, and as a foretaste of what he meant to do when he got the chance he gave the senseless prisoner a sly kick in the ribs.

There was a small island not far from the opposite shore of the lake, and the boat was being pulled toward it.

Don recovered his senses about the time the craft grated its keel on the shingly beach.

One of the Italians, who bore a strong resemblance to Mike Rossi, stepped into the water and pushed the boat further in, and then the party disembarked.

As Jim Kelso and Tony Gulla caught the young contractor by his pinioned arms to drag him out of the boat the boy sat up and gazed around him in a puzzled sort of way.

"You've come to, have ye?" growled the foreman. "Then I reckon ye kin walk some, and save us the trouble of carryin' ye."

They yanked the boy to his feet without ceremony and forced him ashore.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded Don, beginning to realize that something was decidedly wrong in his affairs.

"Ye'll know in good time, Mr. Winthrop," said Kelso, mockingly.

"So it's you, Jim Kelso, is it?" ejaculated Don, in some surprise.

"It's me, all right," replied the man, in an unpleasant tone. "Mebbe yer glad ter see me, and then, agin, mebbe ye ain't."

"Look here, Jim Kelso! If this is some trick of yours or Mr. Newman's, let me tell you you're making a grave mistake. You ought to know by this time that I'm not one that will stand for any monkey business."

"What are ye goin' ter do about it?" sneered the foreman, malevolently.

"Well, for one thing, I'll have you in jail. You'll pay dearly for this outrage, let me tell you. And if your employer is at the back of this affair, as I more than half suspect, he won't find it easy to avoid the responsibility."

"Yah!" exclaimed Kelso savagely, releasing Don's arm and hitting the boy a clout in the face with the flat of his leathery hand that sent him staggering against the Italian Gulla. "Take that for yer answer, curse ye!"

It was a cowardly blow, and Don's eyes flashed fire as he recovered himself.

He wrenched himself free from Gulla's clutches, and, bound as he was, he walked up to Kelso. The man shrank back instinctively, as if he expected a blow.

"I shall not forget that, Jim Kelso," the boy said, with suppressed anger. "It's well for you that you took the precaution to tie my hands before you dared offer me

such an indignity. But, remember, I'll make it my business to bring you down on your knees for that blow. You haven't forgotten your experience under the cliff, I'll warrant. I pity you the next time I get you within reach of my hands. You'll be glad to go to jail after it's over."

It was too dark for Jim Kelso to see the expression on the young contractor's face, but he felt that the boy meant it, just the same.

"Ye'll never git ther chance ter git back at me, Mr. Winthrop," he blurted out. "We didn't take all the trouble of fetchin' you over here just for the fun of the thing. Ye've built all of that there railroad ye're goin' ter."

"What do you mean?" ejaculated Don, for the first time beginning to look at his abduction in a serious light.

"Never you mind what I mean. You'll find that out by and by," retorted Kelso, significantly. "Fetch him along, Gulla," and once more he grasped Don by his bound arm, and with the aid of his confederate hurried him toward the interior of the island.

Don began to feel somewhat apprehensive as to how this adventure was going to end.

The sinister conduct of his captors was far from reassuring.

Were they planning to murder him and conceal his body somewhere in this lonely locality, which he believed was a deserted part of the farther shore, where he knew a crime might easily be committed and all traces of it screened from public observation?

It had not occurred to him that he had been brought to the island where the stone quarries were located, and with whose situation he naturally was familiar.

The island was owned by Andrew Newman, and it was from these quarries he obtained the broken stone he used in building the public roads, of which work he had long enjoyed a monopoly.

Don's thoughts were decidedly unpleasant ones. He believed Jim Kelso was capable of any desperate crime when his worst passions were aroused.

And he judged that the ruffian hungered to get square with him for the beating he had administered to him under the cliff.

It was extremely galling to his proud nature to be pushed and hauled about by a couple of low-browed rascals like the men who had hold of him.

Determined to foil them if he could, he tried to work his hands so as to loosen the rope which held his wrists.

But he soon found this unavailing.

Then, suddenly and without warning, he broke away from Kelso and Gulla, butting Jim in the chest with his head and flooring him.

He then dashed past Jerry and the other two, with the intention of trying to lose them in the darkness.

But the gang was at his heels in short order and, handicapped as he was by his pinioned arms, he could not bring his full powers into play. Therefore it was not many moments before he was tripped up and his flight arrested.

"So ye thought ye'd try and give us the slip, eh?" cried Kelso, with a brutal laugh, when he came up. "Jest as

if ye could, consarn ye!" and he gave the fallen boy a kick in the ribs with the toe of his thick boots.

Tony Guila and Mike Rossi helped the young engineer to his feet.

At the command of their leader they started ahead again with the prisoner, while Jim Kelso and his son closed in behind.

The party proceeded in absolute silence until they arrived at the opening to one of the quarries.

This was not being worked at the time. A rough shanty had been built in the center of the excavation.

Kelso kicked the door open and all hands entered.

The building consisted of only one room, about eight feet square with a window.

The walls were quite bare and unfinished; the window had no sash, being a mere opening five feet or so from the floor, the latter being formed of rough, two-inch plank.

The furnishing consisted of a stove, the pipe from which projected straight through the roof, a rude table and perhaps half a dozen stools.

Jerry went to a shelf, found a bit of candle, and lit it.

"Take da seat; you feela much bet," said Gulla, pushing Don toward one of the stools.

Although the boy resented the way in which the request was given, he saw no reason for refusing to accept it, so he sat down.

Jerry and the two Italians also selected stools, and everything seemed to hinge on the action of Jim Kelso, who was clearly bossing the job.

CHAPTER IX.

FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH.

"I might as well tell you that Newman hasn't any hand in these proceedings," began Jim Kelso, seating himself on the corner of the table and eyeing his victim with undisguised satisfaction.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Don Winthrop. "I'd hate to think that a man in his position would so degrade himself as to connive with such scum as yourself and your crowd in such a dirty trick."

"Don't fool yerself. He's got it in for ye good and hard for stealing that railroad contract away from him. But this here affair is a personal matter between ye an' me, that's all. The boss won't make no kick if he should happen to find out how I disposed of ye. Though I don't reckon he'll ever find out."

His words conveyed a sinister threat, and Don winced in spite of himself.

"What do you propose to do with me?" he asked, as calmly as he could.

"I intend to have satisfaction for the score I owe ye," answered Kelso, with savage earnestness.

"I didn't give you any more than you deserved," said the boy fearlessly.

"Yah!" snarled the ruffian impatiently. "You did what no man ever done before—ye put me down and out with that cursed science of yours. I hate ye for it, and I mean

to do ye up in a way that'll settle all arguments on the subject hereafter."

"You mean you've brought me over here to take it out of me with my hands tied so I can't defend myself. It's what I might expect from such as you."

"No, I don't mean no sich thing. I mean to make ye sweat in another way. Ye'll have jest long enough ter say yer prayers before ye're wiped out for good an' all—do ye understand?"

"Do you intend to murder me?"

"Ye kin call it what ye like—I call it a short shift inter ther next world," and the foreman glared vindictively at him.

"I suppose you know the consequences of such a crime?" said the boy, as coolly as could be expected under the circumstances.

"I don't keer nothin' about no consequences. I don't reckon there'll be any. None of us is goin' to lay his hands on ye. An accident will happen, that's all."

"An accident?" repeated the boy.

"That's what. You're in the disused quarry on Jumbo Island. When the men knocked off work to-day there was one can of nitro-glycerine left in the dynamite safe. I'm goin' to fetch that over here as company for ye after we leave. If it should happen to take a notion to go off by itself, why ye'd go off with it, that's all," and the rascal grinned sardonically.

Don thought he saw through the fiendish scheme, and it made him shudder.

It was as cold-blooded a crime as could well be imagined.

"So ye see the consequences ye spoke about don't amount to nothin'. Ye'll be missed, that's all. The papers'll have an account about an explosion at the quarry on Jumbo Island that blowed a shack of a house to little bits. Newman'll come over and look the matter up to see who's ter blame. And I reckon that's all there'll be to it."

"And you're going to take my life this way simply because I whipped you in a fair, stand-up fight?" and the boy's lips curled contemptuously.

"Yes, and because ye've been tryin' ter get the inside track with that there gal of mine, Nellie. She ain't the same as she was afore she come to know ye. Ye've changed her—do ye understand—and that's one good reason why I intend to be rid of ye," and Jim Kelso showed his teeth with all the ferocity of a wild beast.

"You're a coward and a cur, Jim Kelso. Mark my words, the day will come when you'll wish that this night's work was blotted from your memory."

"Don't ye believe it, Mr. Winthrop. I shan't never feel sorry for wipin' ye off ther earth."

With these words he slipped off the table and walked out the door.

He was gone a short time.

When he returned he had a hammer, a small steel hook, and several yards of stout cord.

He mounted the table, drove the hook into the ceiling, and then tried it to see if it was firm.

"Fetch me a good-sized rock," he said to his son, as he passed the cord over the hook.

Jerry went outside and hunted up one which weighed about forty pounds.

Jim tied one end of the cord securely about it, pulled it up to the ceiling, and securing the other end of the cord to a hook in the wall an inch or so above a small shelf, left the stone to dangle in the air.

Don watched this performance with some curiosity.

What did it mean?

Kelso then held a whispered confab with the Italians. Then the three came over to the young engineer, seized him and bound him down on top of the table.

While they were doing this Jerry brought in a flat stone and placed it directly under the rock which hung above.

The table with the prisoner was turned on its side, and Don's body brought close to the flat stone.

All hands then left the building, and when the sounds of their footsteps died away in the distance there was absolute silence in and around the shanty, the rain having ceased entirely.

Don turned his gaze at the hanging rock, then down at the flat rock, and then at the end of the cord, alongside of which Kelso had placed the three-inch piece of candle.

Whatever infernal arrangement this was he could not understand it.

If it was intended that the rock should fall in some way he could not see what damage that would do, beyond giving him a shake-up.

Was this, after all, some practical joke on Jim Kelso's part?

Did he imagine such a clumsy contrivance would create a mysterious fear in the young contractor's breast?

Don almost smiled at such an idea.

But hark! He heard footsteps again outside.

Presently Jim Kelso entered the building, carrying with the utmost care a can which the boy instantly recognized as a receptacle for nitro-glycerine.

Instantly the meaning of all these preparations flashed through his brain, and the blood fairly congealed around his heart.

The devilish ingenuity of the man was appalling.

He placed the can softly on the floor, and after a glance at the candle on the shelf he spoke.

"Ye've been long enough in the business ter recognize what this can contains," he said, with a horrid grin at Don. "I'm going to place it on that flat stone within a foot of yer head—see? Ye'll have half an hour or so ter live, Mr. Winthrop. By keepin' yer eye on that candle ye kin count yer span of life. As soon as the flame touches the cord it'll begin to burn it. The weakenin' of mebbe a single strand will be enough to cause the weight of that hangin' stone to snap it short off. What then? I reckon I don't need ter tell an eddicated feller like ye what'll take place when the rock hits the can of nitro-glycerine."

"You're a fiend!" cried Don, the sweat gathering in big drops on his forehead.

"I see ye're beginnin' ter wilt already," snickered the man.

"That's where you're mistaken, Jim Kelso. I may have to die, but you'll never be able to say under any circumstances that I took water from such a reptile as you."

"Yah! I might have given ye a chance for yer life, but now—"

"That's a lie, and you know it! You never intended to give me half a chance."

"That's right, drat ye, I didn't. I hate ye so that I'd like to brain ye with a rock, if this wasn't more certain and'll leave no trace behind."

The foreman, fairly livid with passion, shook his clenched fist at the pinioned boy.

"And now good-night to ye. Here's yer through ticket ter perdition, with no stopover checks."

Thus speaking, Jim Kelso cautiously placed the can of nitro-glycerine on the flat rock, and then quickly retreated to the door.

"Better begin' sayin' yer prayers, Mr. Winthrop," he said sneeringly, as he stood with one foot on the sill. "There ain't more'n half an inch of candle between ye and ther nitro-glycerine."

Then he vanished into the darkness and the night, and Don heard the crunching of his thick boots on the gravel grow fainter and fainter, till at last the sound died away in the distance.

Don Winthrop, the young contractor, was left alone with death!

CHAPTER X.

SAVED BY LOVE.

"Must I die like this?" groaned Don, as he strained unavailingly at the rope which held him with the grip of a vise to the table.

Then his eyes rested with a kind of fascination upon the sealed can of nitro-glycerine which stood within a foot of his face.

The contents of that can would easily blow the building and everything it contained to small fragments.

And Don began to wonder if, after all, that would not be an easy death.

"I'll never know what hit me, at any rate. It will be all over in a flash."

Just the same, the very idea of such a death was truly horrible.

It aroused him to make a fresh effort to free himself, which proved just as ineffectual as the other.

Jim Kelso and the Italians had done their work only too well.

Already ten minutes of the fateful half hour estimated by Kelso as representing his span of life had passed away.

Don glanced at the candle on the shelf, which was leaning slightly against the cord, and saw with a shudder that the flame had drawn perceptibly nearer the strands, the severance of which meant the end of all things, as far as he was concerned.

Outside the clouds had gone into the northwest and the full moon was out in all its glory.

At this moment it was rising above the summit of the quarry, and its rays began to shine in at the open window, bathing the boy's head and shoulders in a flood of light.

Suddenly Don thought he heard the sound of a light foot-step without.

The tension of the situation had made his hearing unusually acute.

He listened with a desperate eagerness, mingled with a thrill of hope.

The sound was repeated, this time nearer.

The silence had hitherto been so profound that there could be no mistake but that something or some one was moving about the quarry.

Summoning all his energies, Don shouted:

"Help! Help!"

Instantly there was a quick pattering on the gravel and then the slight noise of something striking against the outside of the building.

"Help! Help!" repeated the young engineer, with a fearful glance up at the burning candle and the cord on which his life hung.

Almost instantly a shadow cut off the ray of moonlight shining in at the door, and a soft voice which the boy readily recognized called out:

"Don Winthrop, are you in there?"

"Heavens!" gasped Don. "It is Nellie!"

"Don—Don Winthrop!"

"Quick, Nellie!" cried the boy, almost sharply. "If you would save my life, come to me here. Follow the sound of my voice."

The blind girl entered the room and came toward him as straight as a die.

Don watched every step she took with the greatest of anxiety.

"Stop where you are!" he called peremptorily.

The girl stopped as ordered.

"Advance one step more," he said quickly.

She obeyed.

"Kneel down!" he ordered.

She did so.

"Stretch out your right hand slowly—that's right. Move it to the left till you feel a can that's standing there. Grasp it by the handle and draw it toward you gently. For heaven's sake, don't let it jar against that rock, or even the boards of the floor—it contains nitro-glycerine."

"I know it," said the girl calmly.

"You know it!" gasped Don, in astonishment.

"Yes," she replied simply. "And I know there is a rock suspended from the ceiling above by a cord, that the cord is attached to the wall, and that there is a lighted candle beside it. Am I not right?"

"You are; but how in the name of all that's wonderful can you tell these things, for you certainly cannot see them, unless you have recovered your sight in some miraculous manner."

"No, I cannot see them; but I know about them just

the same. I'm going to take this can outside," she said, rising to her feet and turning around. "Do I face toward the door?"

"Almost. Just a shade to the right. Now be careful and don't strike the can against the doorjamb. Go slowly. I am quite safe now. The rock may fall, but I need fear only its flying fragments."

Nellie, with a precision that was truly marvelous, carried the can of deadly explosive outside of the shanty and then returned.

The candle flame was now flickering close to the cord.

"Put your left hand on the wall, Nellie," directed the young contractor. "Now walk quickly along till I say 'stop.'"

She followed his order to the letter, and came to a halt within reach of the shelf.

"Raise your hand higher, and you will feel a shelf. Right. Remove the candle you find there."

The flame blew across the cord as she took the candle away.

"Now come here," he said, and she obeyed him, holding the lighted candle in her hand.

"I am securely tied to a table which has been turned on its side. Unless you have a knife you must burn the cord which holds me to the table."

"I have not a knife," she said, as she extended her disengaged hand and felt for the rope, which had been passed a number of times around Don's body.

Then she carefully brought the flame of the candle to bear on the strands of the thin rope, and having severed the line in one place, she dexterously managed to release the boy from his bonds, and he rolled over on his face.

"My hands are tied separately," he said.

Once more she brought the candle's flame to bear on the rope, which she burned through without so much as scorching his skin.

Don then shook himself free of his fetters, and rising to his knees, flung his arms about the blind girl and pressed her to his breast.

"Nellie, it is over! You have saved my life!"

The girl's head fell upon his shoulder, and she hung a limp, dead weight in his arms.

He looked into her face.

It was as pale as marble and her eyes were closed.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "She has fainted!"

CHAPTER XI.

SEALED LIPS.

Springing to his feet and taking Nellie in his arms, Don hurried outside.

He soon found a pool of rain water, with which he began to bathe the girl's face copiously, while he alternately chafed her hands and wrists.

This rude method of bringing an unconscious person to their senses fortunately speedily prevailed in this instance, and Nellie opened her eyes.

"Don Winthrop," she murmured.

"Yes, Nellie!"

"You are safe, are you not?" she said eagerly.

"Yes, thanks to you. Now you must tell me how you came to be here on Jumbo Island, a mile from the cliff where you live. I cannot understand how a blind girl like you could reach this spot all by yourself. And it looks to me as if you knew I was in trouble, and that you came over to aid me."

"Yes," she said, with a shudder. "I had reason to believe your life was in danger. I overheard Mr. Kelso and two Italians, named Gulla and Rossi, plan to cut you off this afternoon when you came out to the men you have at the side of the hill where you are making the cut. Your movements have been watched for days. They had a boat in waiting to take you to the island after dark. I heard Mr. Kelso tell the others how he meant to rig the nitro-glycerine trap so as to add acute torture to your last hours, while at the same time this would remove every trace of the terrible crime they contemplated."

"The scoundrel!" muttered Don.

"No one could ever guess what I have suffered since this awful scheme impressed itself upon my mind. I was locked in my room—indeed, I have not been allowed to leave the house since that afternoon Mr. Kelso discovered us together at the foot of the cliff."

"Did the rascal dare ill-treat you on his return to the cottage that day?"

"He swore at and threatened me, and ordered Mother Kelso to lock me up and never let me out of her sight when I was not in my room."

"Thank goodness, he's abused you for the last time. This job will place him, as well as his confederates, including his precious son, where they won't be able to trouble the community for some time to come. Go on, Nellie."

"This afternoon was selected because it was gloomy and threatened rain. Mr. Kelso said it would just suit his purpose. At four o'clock Gulla, who had been on the watch somewhere along the path which runs around the hills near the lake, came to the cottage and told Mr. Kelso that you had come out, and was talking to the foreman of the gang of workmen. The three men, accompanied by Jerry, immediately left the house, and then I knew you were in great danger. As it became darker and started to rain, I grew desperate at the thought of the peril you were facing. I believe it was largely because of the interest you had shown in me that Mr. Kelso had come to hate you. It was impossible for me to get out of the room by way of the door. Even had I been able to do that, I should have been caught by Mother Kelso. At last I could stand the strain no longer. I opened the window and managed to push myself through, dropping to the ground. I then made my way to the foot of the cliff, clambered over the rocks on the edge of the lake, and ran as fast as I could to the house of Widow Meiggs, who lives on the lake shore nearly a mile from the cliff. I knew she owned a boat and was friendly to me. She readily agreed to let her son row me over to this island when I explained that it was of the utmost importance. The chance that Mr. Kelso and his companions were perhaps

on the island at the moment of our arrival was a risk I had to face. I could only depend on Willie's watchfulness and my own sense of hearing. Willie guided me to the quarries. I tried this one first, leaving him at the entrance to watch."

"I shudder to think that you might have come just in time to share my fate. Do you realize the awful risk you ran to save me? Do you understand that the matter of ten minutes would have made all the difference in the world? Such courage as you, a mere girl, and blind at that, have exhibited fairly staggers me. And I am almost a stranger to you."

"No, not a stranger," she said, placing her hand on his arm. "Don't say that," she added, with an earnestness almost mournful in its intensity. "Have you not brought all this trouble on yourself because you interfered in my behalf? I would rather have died here with you than not have made this effort to defeat the terrible purpose of those wicked men."

"Nellie," said Don, with great emotion, "what you have done for me to-night is quite beyond me ever to repay. You have won my lifelong gratitude, as well as that of my mother and brother. You shall come to my mother's house and live with us."

"I cannot," she cried, with a little cry of despair.

"Cannot! What do you mean? Don't you know that this attempted crime on the part of Jim Kelso will land both him and his son in the State prison for a long term? As to Mother Kelso, as you call her, you surely would not wish to return and experience further abuse at her hands?"

Nellie buried her face in her hands and sobbed bitterly.

"I must go back," she said piteously. "I must."

Don looked at her in astonishment.

"Look here, Nellie; what's at the bottom of your connection with these Kelsos?"

"Please don't ask me," she replied, pleadingly.

"But I want to know," he insisted. "If ever a girl needed a good friend and protector I think you do at this moment. You have just saved my life, and the least I can do in return is to save you from the influences which have hitherto surrounded you. With Jim Kelso and his son out of the way, what have you to fear? Mrs. Kelso could not make you return to her against your will. My mother, my brother and myself will protect you against any harm or trouble if you will only make your home with us in the future."

"I am very grateful to you, Don Winthrop," she answered. "It would make me very happy if I could accept your offer; but——"

"But what?" asked the young engineer impatiently as she paused.

"I cannot. I must go back to Mother Kelso, no matter what happens to Mr. Kelso."

She raised her tear-dimmed eyes, which had no sign of blindness in them, to his face, and her lips quivered.

"I must not," she answered, in a tone which left him

no hope of unraveling through her the secret which he could not fathom.

"Nellie, you cannot guess how this answer of yours pains me," he said sadly.

She took his hands confidently in hers.

"Do not be angry with me," she pleaded. "I have a good reason for my silence. Another's life depends on it."

"Another's life?" repeated the boy, in surprise.

"Yes. One I love dearer than all else in this world—my father."

She bowed her head in her hands and the tears flowed freely.

"There; do not question me further. Let us go from here. Mr. Kelso may be on the watch and, not hearing the explosion, he may return to see what is the matter. Should he do so and find us on the island we could hardly escape him."

"Don't fear for me, Nellie. Now that my hands are free, I warrant you that Jim Kelso and his cowardly Italians would think twice before tackling me. He had a lesson himself that he hasn't forgotten."

At the entrance to the quarry they found young Meiggs, who was thirteen years old, seated upon a rock with his face cocked toward the beach.

They embarked in the boy's boat, and in twenty minutes Nellie and Don were landed at the foot of the cliff, while the boy rowed homeward.

"I hate to part with you, dear little girl," said Don. "But, depend on it, I will see you soon again. I will never feel satisfied until I have rescued you from the clutches of the Kelsos."

Then, yielding to a sudden impulse, he took her face between his hands and kissed her lips.

She uttered a little cry, and springing away, disappeared in the darkness.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FACE OF JIM KELSO.

With a sigh Don Winthrop turned his steps toward Lakeview.

"I wonder what those rascals did with my horse?" he muttered. "Well, they've put their foot in it this time, and I guess Andrew Newman will have to look up another foreman. I will put Jim Kelso through to the limit. If he doesn't get twenty years, at least, for his attempt on my life I'll be greatly disappointed. He deserves a life sentence."

He struck the regular trail around the hill and followed it with a steady stride, which promised soon to land him at the cut where the laborers' houses were. Here he would be able to telephone to the office, for he knew his brother must be anxious over his lengthened and unaccountable absence.

"I'll bet Gil has a party out searching for me, and if they ran across the horse—well, I'll soon be able to set the dear boy's mind at ease."

He presently passed the spot where he had been overpowered by the villains.

"If they had not taken me unawares and struck me that cowardly blow from behind I guess I should have made things interesting for them," he said grimly.

The bright moonlight lighted his way.

"Poor Nellie! If I could only get at the bottom of the mystery which anchors her to the Kelsoes I might be able to help her. I must help her somehow."

When he arrived at the cut he found something doing.

Mike Doyle, the watchman, was the first to see him approaching.

"Upon my word, Mr. Winthrop! Where have you been all this time? Your horse walked in here about five o'clock when the rain was coming down at a smart rate. Your brother sent out every blessed one of the Italians to look for ye, thinking something had gone wrong, but not a sign of ye could they discover between here and the cliff. When the hands knocked off and came in Sinkey and Boggs each headed a searching party, and they came back an hour ago without finding a clew to your whereabouts. Faith, ye look as if ye'd been having a rough time of it."

"I had a bit of adventure, that's all," said Don carelessly. "Is my brother out here?"

"Yes, sir. He's in the office with Boggs and Sinkey."

The office to which Mike Doyle referred to was simply a small boarded-off section of the ground floor of one of the men's houses.

It was furnished with a table, at which Gil sat when he paid the laborers off. A couple of chairs and the telephone completed the furnishings.

Don walked in as cool and collected as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred.

His unexpected appearance was as surprising as it was welcome, and Gil naturally wanted to know right away what had happened to him.

"I'll tell you all about it on the way back," Don replied. "Have our horses brought up, will you, Sinkey?"

It was nine by the clock, and the twenty odd Italians who had been out with the two foremen beating up the hills for a trace of the young boss were now eating their supper.

From his brother Don kept nothing back.

He told Gil the whole story from start to finish.

"Good heavens, Don! You had a close call," said Gil, with a thrill of horror. "And you really mean to say that the blind girl saved your life?" he added, in astonishment.

"She most certainly did."

"And where has she gone? Surely not back to the Kelso cottage after that?"

"She did go back. Nothing I could say was of any avail to influence her to the contrary. Her actions are an enigma to me, almost."

"What do you mean by 'almost'?"

"Well, she gave me a slight hint on the subject, though it necessarily is incomprehensible to me."

And Don told his brother of Nellie's single admission on the subject.

"That scoundrel seems to have some terrible hold on

the girl," said Gil. "After we land him in jail we may perhaps find out what it is."

Don was not very sanguine that the man's capture would afford the desired result.

Mother Kelso seemed to exercise the same power of intimidation over Nellie.

However, he hoped for the best, fully resolved to probe the mystery to its root.

On reaching Lakeview Don immediately sought the chief of the local police and put the matter before him.

It was such a serious affair that several officers were at once sent out to arrest Jim and Jerry, as well as the two Italians, Gulla and Rossi, on sight.

The young contractors then went home, expecting to hear in the morning that the villains had been landed in jail.

But they were disappointed.

The officers scoured the country roundabout, the authorities of the adjacent towns and villages were notified to be on the lookout for the fugitives, and finally the police of several cities within a certain radius were communicated with. But in the end nothing came of it.

The two Kelsoes, Tony Gulla and Mike Rossi had vanished as completely as though the earth had swallowed them up.

Don hired two men to keep constant watch on the Kelso cottage on the cliff, night and day, with orders to notify him of every movement happening in that quarter.

His chief object was to prevent the spiriting away of the blind girl Nellie, which he feared might be contemplated.

Whether Mrs. Kelso discovered or suspected that she was under surveillance we cannot say, but she made no attempt to leave the locality.

Nellie, however, was never seen out of doors.

As days went by work on the railroad progressed rapidly.

Don had all the men he could use with advantage, and he was perfectly satisfied with the results achieved.

Drilling and blasting was under way at the base of the cliff, and at this point the young contractor spent a large part of his time.

He made several attempts to get into communication with Nellie, but his efforts failed.

She was too vigilantly guarded for that.

Mrs. Kelso maintained a scornful and defiant attitude.

How she managed to get her supplies no one could tell, for she was never absent from the cottage herself, and no one was seen to go there.

By the middle of summer the cut was finished and the steam shovel put out of commission.

The grading of the line was practically finished to the satisfaction of the railroad company from the outskirts of Lakeview to the mouth of the tunnel, which was now two-thirds completed.

The large force of laborers thus released was transferred to the other side of the cliff, where they had plain sailing almost all the way to Glendale.

The filled-in site accepted by the carriage manufactory

had been paid for, and the young contractors had made a clear profit of \$4,000 on this speculation.

The site they had purchased for a summer hotel was rapidly being put into shape for the foundation, and Don expected to have the carpenters at work within the next thirty days.

Plans for this building had long since been drawn up, and Don had recently advertised a two years' lease of the projected establishment.

The building would be ready for occupancy the following spring.

"I received an answer to our advertisement this morning from a well known Chicago hotel man," said Don to his brother one morning early in July. "He's coming down to inspect the location and go over the plans."

"Glad to hear it. What are you going to place the rent at? There will be accommodations for three hundred guests, and this place is going to be the summer resort of northern New York in a very little time. As soon as this branch line is put in operation it will have every advantage one could wish for."

"I can't say yet what rent we will get for the hotel. I will have to consult experienced persons on the subject before I can hit on a price; but you can rest easy, Gil; it will yield a handsome profit on our investment."

"We have got one of the best locations on the lake, all right," said Gil. "You mustn't let that fact escape you when you are fixing the price."

"Trust me for that, Gil. I'm out for the dough as well as the next fellow."

Then the two brothers, who had been standing outside the unfinished tunnel, separated, Gil returning to the bore, while Don started to skirt the base of the cliff, where it was laved by the waters of the lake, in order to reach the scene of the railroad beyond the tunnel.

As the lake was perfectly placid that afternoon it was an easy matter to step from rock to rock and thus gain the other side of the precipitous wall.

When half way around Don paused and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

It was decidedly hot in the sun, and there was scarcely any breeze stirring.

The surface of the water was as unruffled as the face of a mirror, glittering in the sunshine like a plate of burnished gold.

As the boy stood there taking in the sweep of the water-scape, there suddenly came a whiz through the air, as a big rock, apparently dislodged from above, descended obliquely toward his head.

Fortunately, its aim was not true, and it passed an inch above the young engineer's shoulder, striking him a glancing blow on the head. This, however, was sufficient to stagger him and cut a jagged scalp wound.

Recovering his balance, Don glanced up at the face of the rock mechanically, and there, more than half way up, peering down at him with a look of calm ferocity, was the repulsive countenance of Jim Kelso.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

Don Winthrop was thunderstruck at the sight of his enemy, for whom the police of Lakeview and vicinity had sought in vain, finally giving up the search in the belief that the man and his confederates had escaped from the State.

"Jim Kelso—here!" gasped the boy, hardly believing the evidence of his eyes.

Shaking off the feeling of dizziness which came over him for a moment, he looked up again; but the rascal had disappeared.

"The villain is crouching up there among the rocks," he muttered. "It was he who launched that rock down upon me, beyond a doubt. What an escape I've had! By George, I'll rout him out of there before he is five minutes older!"

He dashed back across the rocks as if it was the smoothest pathway in the world, and reappeared before the mouth of the tunnel just as Gil and Joe Sinkey came walking out.

"Great Scott, Don! What's happened to you?" gasped Gil, observing the smear of blood on his brother's face and the red gash just above his right ear.

Ignoring his brother's excited remark, Don seized Gil by the shoulder.

"Get your men out of here, quick!" he exclaimed sharply.

Sinkey, being accustomed to obey the orders of his superiors without question, jumped back into the tunnel and shouted to the laborers, with such good effect that every man of them, except the men directing the operations of the steam drills, came rushing out.

"Get around on the rocks, every one of you, and look for a chap that's hiding somewhere up on the cliff!" ordered Don. "It's Jim Kelso," he explained to his brother, as they followed in the wake of Joe Sinkey and his men.

"What!" ejaculated Gil, in astonishment. "You don't mean you actually saw Kelso around here?"

"I met Kelso," said Don. "This wound is a gentle reminder of his presence and his amiable intentions toward me."

"Good heavens! That fellow has lots of nerve!" said Gil.

The Italians led by Sinkey scaled the rocks like so many monkeys.

The cliff was accessible about two-thirds of the way up; beyond that, for a matter of twenty feet, it was like a smooth wall.

As far as the men could go the rocks were thoroughly overhauled, but they found not the slightest trace of Jim Kelso, nor of any one else.

"He must have managed to get away during the minute or two I lost in coming after the men," remarked Don regretfully.

"Too bad!" responded Gil. "It would give me a heap of satisfaction to see that scoundrel in jail."

"We'll get him there yet," said Don, with a confident nod of his head.

"I shall not feel easy until we do," replied his brother; "he's making most persistent attempts to do you up. He's a desperate scoundrel."

"I wonder where he could have got in so short a time," said Don, scanning the face of the cliff intently.

"He must have scrambled down and sneaked off around the rocks in an incredibly short space of time."

"I suppose so. If there had been any hiding place up there the Italians would have found it, I imagine."

Half an hour was wasted to no purpose over Jim Kelso, and then the laborers returned to their work. Don, with his head bound up, went on around the cliff, jumped on a hand-car, and was soon inspecting the more advanced part of the railroad work.

Gil called up their bookkeeper and general office assistant in Lakeview, and told him to notify the police that Jim Kelso had been seen in the vicinity of his cottage.

A couple of officers came out late in the day and made a tour of the neighborhood, making another thorough search of the cottage; but their efforts were not productive of results.

One fact, however, was brought out, and it occasioned Don a good deal of concern. Nellie, the blind girl, was missing from the cottage.

This, too, in the face of the constant watch that had been kept on the house on the cliff.

How had it been managed?

Don believed the night watchman must have fallen asleep at his post, and that this fact had become known and taken advantage of by Mrs. Kelso, who was about as artful as they make them.

In fact, after that day's adventure it was by no means certain that Jim Kelso had not been in the neighborhood all the time search was being made for him and his companions in guilt.

It was quite possible he had a hiding place which, so far, had defied detection.

Don was not thoroughly satisfied with the exertions of the police.

He and Gil talked the matter over, and that night after supper they rode out to the cut, left their horses in charge of Mike Doyle, and then walked on through the excavation, which was now completed and graded, ready for the permanent sleepers and rails.

The night was warm and still, but the sky was overcast with flashes of lightning in the distance.

They passed through the cut and took their way over the hills beyond the rear of the Kelso cottage.

In making this detour they purposely pursued the least-frequented route, which took them down through a gully in the hills.

"I think we made a mistake in taking this road," said Gil. "It'll take us all night to make our way through this brush."

"Oh, there can't be so much of it," returned his brother encouragingly.

Just then a stout twig pierced Gil's light jacket and tore a big hole in it.

"There now!" he ejaculated discontentedly; "at this rate I shall not have a stitch on my back when we come out at the other end."

"Hush!" cried Don, in a sharp whisper at that moment.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm sure I heard voices."

"What, down here?"

"Yes; keep quiet and listen."

Gil complied with this request, and strained his ears to catch any sound which might strike on the night air.

"Now do you hear it?" whispered his brother Don, gripping him by the arm.

"I hear something," replied Gil, in similarly guarded tones.

"Follow me, and don't make a sound if you can help it."

Don parted the brush which lay in a dense mass in front of him, and carefully felt his way down the gully.

The two boys advanced like slow-moving shadows, and with every step the sound of voices grew more distinct.

At last they felt they were close upon the speakers.

"We can't go more than a step or two further without betraying our presence," Don whispered into Gil's ear. "They're just around this bend."

"Who do you fancy they are?" asked his brother softly.

"One of them I can almost swear to be Jim Kelso, and the other——"

Here Don pushed his head warily through the brush.

He found himself looking into the pocket of a gully.

A red glass lantern, similar to those used by railroad men or contractors, was standing on the ground in a small, cleared place.

It gave out sufficient light for the boy to recognize the two men seated on a section of a decayed tree, which had been rolled down into the gully.

One of them, as he had surmised, was Jim Kelso. He looked thoroughly disreputable in his attire, as if he had sustained hard usage of late. His companion, who was stout and well dressed, was none other than Andrew Newman.

That these two persons should be found together in earnest consultation at such a place, and under the circumstances that surrounded the ex-foreman, was a disquieting discovery for Don to make.

The boy scented trouble.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PROPOSITION JIM KELSO MADE TO ANDREW NEWMAN.

"I tell you, Jim, you've not only ruined yourself, but you've muddled up all my plans by your mad break against the life of Donald Winthrop at the quarry," Andrew Newman was saying in a tone of plain dissatisfaction. "What in thunder have you got against the boy that you can run such a desperate risk in order to gratify your personal animosity?"

"I hate him!" hissed Kelso vindictively.

"Well, I know you have had it in for him ever since he struck that boy of yours——"

"Hittin' Jerry ain't got nothin' ter do with it."

"No?" said Newman, blinking at his late foreman curiously. "You spoke once as if you had your knife into him for that."

"Well, I did; but it was on account of that gal of mine," said Kelso doggedly.

"What about the girl? He was not trying to make love to her, was he?" grinned the contractor tantalizingly. "I shouldn't imagine a chap like Winthrop had any time to waste over a blind girl."

"It don't make no diff'rence whether he had the time or not, he made it his bizness to interest himself too all-fired much in her to suit me," snarled Kelso.

"How was that?"

"After that first time he butted in 'tween her and Jerry he came up to my place and wanted to see her; but my old woman sent him about his bizness without much ceremony, you bet your life!" and the speaker grinned malevolently. "But after he got started gradin' ther road I saw him several times nosin' around the foot of the cliff about where the tunnel openin' is now. I reckon he was tryin' to get sight of the gal; but the old woman wouldn't let her outside. One afternoon the gal gave her the slip, somehow, for I ketched her talkin' to him down near the water. I sneaked up behind him an' heard somethin' of what he was sayin'. I had an idea she might have heard me tell the old woman what I intended to do ag'in the new railroad, and that she would put him on his guard. But it appears he was tryin' to get her to give us the shake, which she knows better'n to do; and finally he tried to make her tell him what sort of a hold I had upon her."

"Then you have a hold on the girl, eh?" said Newman, with some interest. "I always thought there was something queer about her connection with you. Besides, I couldn't understand why you wanted a blind girl around your premises, anyway."

"It doesn't make no diff'rence whether I've got a hold on her or not, nor why I kept her around. That's my affair, and I wasn't goin' ter have this pesky young contractor pokin' about tryin' ter find out what didn't concern him."

"You were afraid he might learn something about the girl which would upset your calculations, is that it?" asked the contractor, shrewdly.

"That's about the ticket, if ye want to know," admitted Kelso, surlily.

"He didn't learn anything, did he?"

"No, he didn't. I told him to git, and if he'd done it and let the gal alone after that I reckon I shouldn't have tried to do him up. It ended in a scrap, and he laid me out."

"Laid you out?" said Andrew Newman in amazement. "Do you mean to say that boy whipped you with his fists?"

"That's what he did. He's been and took lessons from some prizefighter, for I couldn't reach him nohow. You'd

have thought I was a chicken the way he handled me, and that's why I hate him. He's the first fellow that ever got the best of me, and I've sworn to settle him for it."

"And you've put yourself into a nice hole trying to do it, haven't you?"

"I'll reach him yet," gritted the rascal.

"I think you've done damage enough, both to yourself and me, by your recklessness. You want to get out of the State just as soon as you can, or you'll land behind the bars before you're many hours older."

"Don't you worry yourself about me, Mr. Newman," said the rascal, with a hoarse chuckle. "I kin look out for myself. I reckon I've fooled the perlice these three months. I haven't been out of sight of my house the whole time they were huntin' for me. They ain't goin' to get me so easy as you think."

"Well, you know your business. You sent for me to come out here to see you. I suppose you want money. I brought you \$100."

"I want a good deal more than \$100," said Kelso, as he accepted the money; "but I stand ready to earn it."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Ye said awhile ago that the quarry affair had blocked your schemes for doin' up their railroad contract."

"I did. I depended entirely upon you to queer them one way or another. Your recklessness simply killed my chances."

"Mebbe it did, and mebbe it didn't," retorted Kelso, doggedly. "They haven't finished the work yet."

"Well, it looks mighty like they were going to finish it on time," said the contractor, gloomily. "I had no idea those boys had it in them."

"Mebbe ye'll remember I told ye one day, jest afore they began the job, that if ye expected to do 'em up ye'd have to get right down to bizness. Ye see I was right, don't ye?"

"I'm not denying but they've surprised me," admitted the contractor. "But if you had simply looked strictly after my interests instead of yielding to an insane temptation to do up Donald Winthrop on your own account, it is not unlikely I should have been able to put a spoke in that railroad contract."

"I reckon I see a way to put a mighty big spoke in it yet," said Kelso grimly.

"In what way?" asked Andrew Newman, with a sudden show of interest.

"What are you willing to stand if I put it through?"

"How can you do anything that'll interfere with the building of the line now? You're a marked man, certain to be arrested on sight," answered Andrew Newman, incredulously.

"That hain't got nothin' ter do with it," said Jim Kelso, wagging his head confidently. "I've got a plan, and I mean bizness. I haven't been asleep while I've been under cover."

"Tell me what your scheme is, and if I see anything in it I'll agree to pay you every cent it's worth to me."

"Will ye? Well, it's easily worth \$5,000 to ye."

"That's a good deal of money, Jim."

"Isn't it worth that to bust this new firm up an' drive 'em out of bizness in these diggin's?"

"Will this plan of yours, if successful, have that effect?" asked the contractor, growing interested in the proposition of his late foreman.

"It'll go a long way toward it, I reckon."

"Let's hear what it is, and then I'll be able to judge of its value."

"Suppose somethin' happened to that tunnel they're borin' through ther cliff? More'n half the masonry is already in place. Wouldn't it kind of upset the time calculations of them boys?"

"Do you mean to say that you can destroy the work in that tunnel as it stands?" asked Andrew Newman, doubtfully.

"That's jest what I mean."

"How are you going to manage it?" asked Mr. Newman, in some excitement.

"That's my bizness. If you'll agree to pay me \$5,000 when the job is done I'll put it through."

"Of course you couldn't do any such thing without a lot of dynamite. Where do you expect to get it?"

"Ye're askin' too many questions, Mr. Newman," said Kelso, impatiently. "If ye want ther job done, say so."

"Well, if the work were thoroughly done it would certainly cripple the Winthrops to a considerable extent," mused the big contractor, with some eagerness of manner. "As this is their first big contract, it would hurt their reputation, I guess. It might even prevent them finishing the work within the time. At any rate, it would mean a big loss to them, and might leave me a clear field to scoop in the contract for the trolley line between Lakeview and Greenville, for which bids will soon be asked."

Andrew Newman was hot after the contract to build the trolley road in question, and it was no secret that the Winthrops would bid against him when the time came.

Under these circumstances he could easily afford to throw away \$5,000 if he could thereby eliminate them from the field.

"Well, Jim, you go ahead and see what you can do. If you can make good in a way that'll prove to be to my advantage I'll see that you get \$5,000. I guess it'll be worth that to me."

"Get your \$5,000 ready, for the job will be finished before mornin'."

"Do you really mean that, Jim?"

"Did ye ever know me ter say what I didn't mean?"

"Very well; I'll get back to town now. As soon as I learn that you have accomplished the work the money will be at your disposal."

"I'll call for it myself to-morrow night at your house. Be on the watch for me."

Andrew Newman stared at his former foreman.

The fellow's assurance was amazing.

"You seem to be certain of success," he said.

"I reckon I am," replied Kelso, as he took up the lantern and started to lead the contractor from the scene of the confab.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CAR OF DEATH.

There was evidently an outlet at the back of the pocket, for in that direction Jim Kelso piloted his late employer, and the two men almost immediately disappeared from view.

Don Winthrop drew back his head and turned to his brother, who had been leaning against him during the entire interview.

"You heard all they said, didn't you, Gil?" he asked, in a guarded tone.

"Every word, but I did not catch sight of either of them. What are we going to do to defeat this piece of villainy? It's lucky we came out here to-night."

"It was providential, Gil," replied his brother solemnly. "Whatever plans that scoundrel has for accomplishing his purpose, they seem to be well matured from the way he talked. His confidence staggers me. You may be sure he is not alone in this. Those two Italians and his son Jerry are with him hand and glove. How they have managed to elude the police, who have been over every foot of this ground, astonishes me. That they have managed to live three months under cover hereabouts shows that they have their allies on the outside. Now that we are forewarned as to their intentions we must round them up before they can carry their dastardly scheme into execution. After that we will attend to Mr. Newman, who has made himself an accessory before the fact, and to that extent he will come within the meshes of the law. Now, Gil, you get back to the cut as soon as you can. Rouse up a dozen of the Italians you can trust in this emergency and get them over to the neighborhood at once. Keep well in the background until I join you, or you see the chance to get the drop on these rascals. I'll see what I can do to nip the scheme in the bud."

"All right," said Gil, in a quiver of excitement. "But do be careful how you act, Don. You know what you're up against. Better the tunnel should be destroyed than that any harm come to you."

"Don't worry about me, Gil. You do your part, and I'll warrant we'll catch Jim Kelso and his accomplices red-handed."

Gil pressed his brother's hand and hurried away on his mission, while Don cautiously entered the pocket of the gully and walked in the direction taken by Kelso and Andrew Newman.

The dynamite used in blasting the tunnel was stored on the hillside in a hut a quarter of a mile from the tunnel.

Two watchmen, in turn, guarded the place night and day.

A temporary track was built from the hut to the mouth of the tunnel, and the explosive, when needed, was carried down in a handcar.

Don guessed that Jim Kelso intended to get possession of the dynamite stored in the hut and use it to wreck the tunnel.

He determined to prevent this at any hazard.

So when he made his way out of the series of gullies in the hills he directed his steps toward the hut.

He found the watchman on the alert.

The man naturally was surprised to see him there at that hour.

"Jennings," said Don, when he came up, "an attempt is to be made to-night by a gang of rascals—Jim Kelso, his son Jerry, and the two Italians, Gulla and Rossi—who have been concealed in this vicinity ever since the quarry affair, to steal the dynamite we have on hand and use it to wreck the tunnel. I want you to run down and bring the tunnel watchman back with you. The three of us ought to be able to stand them off with our revolvers."

"All right, sir," replied the watchman, and he started down the declivity to carry out his orders.

Don stood in the shadow of the doorway and waited.

On such a night, under a gloomy sky, it was a particularly dismal spot.

The lake looked like a vast blot on the surface of the landscape.

The only light to be seen anywhere was the solitary gleam issuing from one of the windows of the cottage on the cliff.

Five minutes passed slowly away, then ten minutes, and still no sign of the two watchmen.

"It's time those two fellows were here," muttered Don, impatiently.

Unseen by the boy, two shadows crept upon the hut from behind.

They parted at the back of the building, where it was encased in its mound of earth, and each glided up on opposite sides.

Only one stepped out in front, and the young engineer saw the figure at once.

"Who's there?" he demanded, with his right hand on his revolver.

"Don't move, or I'll drill a hole through ye," cried the voice of Jim Kelso, and Don bit his lip with vexation, for he saw the rascal had him covered with a pistol.

"Throw up your hands!" commanded the ex-foreman peremptorily.

Don determined to take a desperate risk.

Making a feint to obey the order, he drew his own revolver, and like a flash had it pointed straight at the scoundrel.

His intention had been to fire at once, and it would have gone hard with Kelso, but at the moment he pressed the trigger his arms were suddenly caught from behind and the bullet went wide of its mark.

"Who have ye got here, anyhow?" growled Kelso. "He doesn't look like the watchman."

It was clear he had not recognized Don in the dark.

Tony Gulla, who had been kneeling on the boy's back while he was tying his hands, turned the prisoner over and thrust his ugly countenance close down to the young contractor's face.

"Gotta da match, boss? Betta one dol' we gotta da prize pack."

"What do you mean by that?" grunted Kelso, as he fumbled in his pockets for a lucifer.

"Strika da light you see whata maka you feela gooda." Kelso found a match and lit it.

He held it down toward the face of his prisoner and started back with an oath.

"Donald Winthrop!"

"Whata I say?" grinned the Italian. "We catcha da boss of da job. Gooda haul. No expect."

Kelso was clearly surprised.

Don Winthrop was the last person he expected to run across out there that night.

All the same, he was none the less pleased to get the boy in his power again.

The failure of his murderous attempt on the young contractor that afternoon had not improved his temper.

He had cursed his luck at intervals ever since.

But now fortune had turned most opportunely in his favor.

"I've got ye agin where the shoe pinches, haven't I?" he said mockingly. "Ye couldn't have turned up at a better time. I was beginnin' to think ye had a charmed life. I thought nothin' would fetch ye. If ye're lucky enough to get away this time ye deserve a gold medal."

Two more shadows came out of the gloom in front.

A squeaking sound followed them.

They proved to be Jerry Kelso and Mike Rossi dragging up a handcar.

The procession came to a stop a few feet away.

"We found two watchmen down yonder, dad, instead of one, as we s'posed," said Jerry, wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

"You got 'em all right, did ye?"

"Betcher life we did. We left them bound and gagged where they wouldn't get hurt by the explosion. We brought up some tools to break open the door of the hut with. I guess you kin do that part of the job better'n the rest of us."

"I guess I kin," said his father gruffly; "and while I'm doin' it ye might feast yer eyes on ther gent Gulla and me got hold of a minute ago."

"What, the watchman?" ejaculated his hopeful son, looking carelessly down at Don as he lay on the ground, earnestly praying for the appearance of his brother on the scene with the much-needed help at his back.

"No, not the watchman, you idiot!" snarled the elder Kelso. "The chap that we tried to do up at the shanty in the quarry and didn't."

"Not Donald Winthrop!" fairly gasped Jerry.

"Ef ye don't believe me, look him over," said his father, taking up one of the tools and making an attack on the lock of the door.

"Well, powder me blue, who'd have thought it!" exclaimed Jerry, after he had struck a match and recognized the prisoner. "What are ye goin' ter do with him?"

"I don't mean to do a thing to him. Why should I?" said the rascal sarcastically.

"That's right," returned Jerry, who thoroughly understood his father's humor. "I didn't know but you was goin' to give him a ride on the dynamite," grinned the youth.

"You're a good gresser, Jerry," replied his parent approvingly, as he managed to snap the lock. "That's jest what I'm goin' ter do with him. There, the door's open. Gulla, you and Rossi are used to handling dynamite. Jest fetch the stuff out and load it on the car. See that it's secured so it won't slip off, none of it."

The Italians got busy, and in fifteen minutes every pound of the explosive in the hut was transferred and secured to the handcar.

"Now, Mr. Winthrop, we'll pile you on top, and see if you can get away from it as easily as you did from the nitro-glycerine over at the shanty. Ye are booked straight for the mouth of the tunnel—ye and the dynamite. When the car strikes at the end of the route I reckon there'll be somethin' doin'."

The ruffian's words sent a chill of horror to Don's heart. He felt that he was doomed to a horrible death.

The help that he knew was coming would arrive too late to save him or avert the catastrophe he had planned to prevent.

Jim Kelso had adopted a different course to achieve his object from anything Don had expected.

Such a plan as loading the dynamite on a handcar and despatching it down the grade had not suggested itself to the boy.

But then it is often the unexpected that occurs.

And this unfortunately was a case in point.

Gulla and Rossi lifted the young contractor from the ground and secured him to the car as best they could.

At any rate, he seemed to be safe enough for the short trip.

"Ye kin say yer prayers as ye go down," said Kelso, brutally, and he gave the signal to start the car on its fatal journey.

The two Italians gave it a push, and the wheels began to turn.

In a moment or two it began to gather momentum and slipped away from their hands.

Then it vanished into the gloom of the night, and the four villains waited with strained attention for the explosion they looked for to follow.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

Every second the speed of the handcar with its load of dynamite—enough to shatter the tunnel from foundation to roof—and its one living passenger, bound to the side of the platform, increased as it dashed down the grade.

Half way down the wheels revolved so fast that the hum of their revolution struck on Don's ears with rising distinctness.

It was the requiem of death.

Apparently nothing could save him now.

Like a flitting shadow it passed the startled gaze of a dozen men, headed by Gil, who had just arrived on the scene.

"What's that?" exclaimed Gil to Mike Doyle, the night watchman at the cut, whom he had fetched along.

"Sure, it's a handcar running wild, sir!"

"A handcar—"

A crash and a tremendous explosion cut the words out of his mouth.

The face of the cliff was lit up for a moment by the glare, and then darkness, more intense than ever, settled about the scene.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Gil. "We're too late. They have dynamited the tunnel!"

The crowd of Italians, preceded by the boy and the watchman, made a rush for the mouth of the tunnel.

Within twenty feet of it Doyle tripped upon a yielding obstruction in his path, and went floundering on his hands and knees.

"What the dickens—" he began, as he recovered himself and felt of the object. "Why, it's a man, as I'm a Christian!"

"Is that you Doyle," said a strange voice, and the figure seemed struggling to sit up.

"By all the blessid saints, it's never you, Mr. Winthrop, is it, sor?"

"It isn't anybody else, Mike," replied the recumbent object. "Cut me loose if you've a knife handy."

"Gee whiz! What's the matter with ye?"

"My hands are bound behind my back."

"Faith, that's rough. And how did ye come this way?" asked Doyle, as he knelt beside his boss and fished in his pocket for the jackknife he always carried.

"It's the work of Jim Kelso and his pals," answered Don, who had escaped from the handcar and certain destruction in the most remarkable manner. "I'm pretty badly shaken up. You'll hardly believe me when I say I was bound to a handcar loaded with dynamite and sent down the grade to what was apparently my death. Thank heavens, I have escaped; but I am afraid the scoundrel have succeeded in destroying our work in the tunnel."

"Sent down the grade on a car of dynamite, did ye say, sir? Sure, we heard the explosion a minute ago, and your brother, meself and the laborers were running down to see what damage had been done when I tripped over ye. How did you happen to leave the car before she struck? Did ye roll off?"

"They didn't mean that I should, for they tied me on," said the boy, getting on his feet and shaking himself, as it were. "I guess I'm all right, in spite of the fling I had. It all happened in a twinkling, Mike. I had given up hope of ever seeing daylight again, but just as I made out the dark shadow of the cliff looming up before me, with the expectation of death in a couple of seconds more, I felt a sudden jolt, and the rope which held me to the car parted with a snap—it must have been half rotten—and I was flung off like a stone from a catapult. As I

struck the ground and rolled over half stunned a roar sounded in my ears. I did not realize another thing until I heard your voice, which I instantly recognized. It seemed the sweetest sound at the moment I had ever heard, though I could not tell how badly hurt I was."

"Glory! Ye've had a wonderful escape, Mr. Winthrop, and it's glad I am to be able to congratulate ye on the strength of it."

"Amen to that, Mike!" said Don, grasping the watchman's hand and giving it a hearty shake.

In another moment they were at the mouth of the tunnel, where several lanterns were now twinkling and flitting about.

More lanterns were to be seen around the corner of the cliff, where most of the men seemed to be gathered.

"Why, how's this?" exclaimed Don, in the utmost amazement. "The tunnel seems to be all right."

"Sure it is!" echoed the voice of Mike Doyle.

"Beta you life," said an under-foreman named Zottarelli, coming up with his lantern. "Everyt'ing all right, boss. Noa blowa up here. Looka down yon'. Taka da face offa da cliff. Grata big smash."

"Come on!" cried Don, excitedly. "The car must have jumped the track at the last moment and hit the cliff a hundred feet away. Great Scott! What a fortunate escape for us!"

"That you, Don?" asked Gil, as his brother appeared hurriedly on the scene of the explosion. "I've been looking for you. Those scoundrels just missed doing us up, all right, by the looks of things. Look at the effects of the dynamite here. Why, the whole corner of the cliff is blown to fragments. That's the end of as pretty a bit of natural decoration as we have about here. Too bad, isn't it?"

"Much better the loss of the scenic effect than the tunnel and my life along with it," said Don solemnly.

"Your life!" exclaimed Gil, in a startled voice. "Why, what do you mean?"

"I'll tell you all about it later," replied the brother, looking up at the ruins.

A drizzling rain set in about this time, which, with the intense darkness of the night, put a stop to any further investigation of the damage done to the cliff.

The two watchmen were discovered bound and gagged half way up the hillside, when a section of the party, headed by Don, started toward the hut. They did not have any expectation of seeing any trace of Jim Kelso and his crowd, however.

Those scoundrels had fled immediately after the explosion of the dynamite.

They had discovered the proximity of Gil Winthrop and his party of Italians, and fully believing their dastardly work had been successfully accomplished, they deemed it a prudent move to make themselves scarce.

They did not go far away, as Jim Kelso was not yet prepared to shake the dust of the neighborhood from his feet.

He and his son, for very cogent reasons, intended to visit the cottage before morning.

After some hours, when quiet had settled down once more around the cliff, they started to make the contemplated move.

Much to his rage and disappointment, Kelso found that half a dozen Italian laborers were encamped across the only road by which he could reach the top of the cliff.

As many more were guarding the tunnel, though he made no attempt to go in that direction.

Soon after daybreak on the following morning Don and Gil were on the ground where the explosion had occurred, making an examination of the huge break in the cliff.

"There seems to be a hole up there of some kind," remarked Don. "I'm going up to see what it is."

The young engineer mounted the jagged fissure with proper caution.

The opening in question appeared to be the beginning of a subterranean passage leading into the heart of the cliff.

Curiosity compelled Don to enter it and to follow its course, to see where it would wind up.

Whether it was the work of nature or man the boy did not stop to consider.

He penetrated the passage for a distance he thought to be about one hundred yards, when he unexpectedly emerged into a cavern-like room.

A lighted lantern hung from a hook stuck into the wall.

By the dim light thus afforded Don saw there was a table, two stools, and a cot in the place.

Upon the cot, attired as Don had last seen her, lay Nellie the blind girl asleep.

The boy had advanced well into the underground retreat before he recognized the identity of the sleeper.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, thoroughly astonished by his discovery. "Nellie—in this underground hole! What can it mean?"

He accidentally jarred the table, and a spoon slipped from a plate of untasted food and rattled on the stone floor.

The noise awoke the blind girl and she started up in an attitude of attention.

"Nellie!" said Don softly, advancing to the cot.

She gave a little scream of startled surprise.

"Donald Winthrop! You here?"

"Yes, Nellie!"

She sprang to her feet and extended both of her hands to him.

"Surely something must have happened, else you could not have gained access to this place, which is directly under the cottage."

"Yes, little girl, something has happened. Kelso tried to destroy our tunnel with dynamite last night; but his plan miscarried, and instead the end of the cliff is badly shattered. Surely you must have felt the shock of the explosion?"

"I did. It awakened me from my sleep. But I could not understand what it meant."

"The falling away of the rock disclosed an opening, which I discovered this morning. I found it led into a kind of passage and, curious to see where it went, I followed its course until I reached this cavern-like room and found you asleep on that cot. There; that's the whole story."

"Then you can save my father!" she exclaimed, in a fever of sudden excitement, seizing the young engineer by the arm. "You will save him, will you not, for my sake?"

"Your father! What do you mean? Where is he?" cried Don in astonishment.

"He is there, behind those boards," and she pointed toward a section of the cavern-like room which Don, for the first time, noticed was partitioned off from the rest of the place. "He has been a prisoner there for years."

"A prisoner?" said the young contractor in amazement.

"Yes," she answered brokenly. "We were both trapped here long ago by Mr. Kelso, who wanted to get possession of an invention of my father's—an automatic coupler for freight cars which he had had patented. Mr. Kelso swore my father should never see the light of day again until he assigned his rights to him, and this my father has steadfastly refused to do. I was seldom permitted to see him, but made to work for Mrs. Kelso as a servant; and the threat was held over my head that if I ever breathed a word about my father's presence here his death would instantly follow. I knew Mr. Kelso was capable of such a crime, and I knew he would not hesitate to carry out his threat, as he bitterly hated my father for his obstinacy in refusing to do as he wished him. He is the direct cause of my blindness, which was occasioned by a fall from the rocks which I sustained at his hands."

"The scoundrel!" said Don, clenching his fists.

"As long as my father was in his power I was silent; but now that I see a way for his escape I fear the Kelso's no longer, for I feel you are my friend—that you will protect my father from that man once he is away from the place."

"Have no fear, Nellie; I will stand by both you and your father. But there is little now to dread from the Kelso's. They have run the length of their rope. I have no doubt but that it was here those rascals were concealed all this time while the police were looking for them. Instead of blowing up the tunnel they only succeeded in destroying their own place of refuge. I shall send my whole force of men in search of them at once, and I'll wager I'll have them in jail before night."

Don had Nellie's father, whose name he ascertained to be Edward Moore, removed from the underground cavern to his mother's home, and Nellie, of course, went there with him.

Both received a kindly welcome from Mrs. Winthrop, whose sympathies were naturally attracted to the beautiful little blind girl.

Mrs. Kelso was immediately arrested at the cottage on information furnished by Don Winthrop, and late that afternoon Jim Kelso, his son, and the two Italians were

cornered in the woods fifteen miles from Lakeview and taken prisoners.

They were afterward tried on the charge of attempted murder at the quarry on Jumbo Island, Jim Kelso getting twenty years, the Italians fifteen years apiece, and Jerry seven years.

The second indictment, covering the attempted destruction of the railroad tunnel at the high rock cliff, still stands against them, and when their terms are out each will have to face the certainty of another long term.

With the exit of the Kelso gang from the scene there was no further trouble encountered by the Winthrop brothers with the railroad contract, and the work was satisfactorily completed within the contract limit.

The two young contractors later on obtained the contract for building the trolley road from Lakeview to Greenville.

They encountered no opposition from Andrew Newman, because that gentleman had just been tried and sentenced to five years imprisonment for complicity in the tunnel outrage.

The boys' profit on the D. P. & Q. branch line was something like \$40,000 in all, and they made about half as much on the trolley contract.

The summer hotel was duly erected on the selected site alongside of the beautiful lake, and proved to be a winner, the three years' lease arranged with the Chicago hotel man bringing them in \$10,000 per year.

The young contractors have greatly extended the business left by their father, and Don is now about to close a deal for building a railroad in Mexico.

He will be married in a few weeks to Nellie Moore, the little girl who saved his life in such a wonderful way on Jumbo Island.

She is no longer blind.

Money was no object to Don where she was concerned, and a great oculist succeeded in repairing the mischief caused by the villainous Jim Kelso so many years ago.

Mr. Moore himself recovered his health, shattered by long confinement in the cavern under the Kelso cottage, and he realized a big fortune out of his automatic coupler patent.

With everything before them to make life happy, we bid farewell to the young contractors of Lakeview.

THE END.

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